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Adventure

The BOSS' Daughter

A Complete Novelette

By William West

TALBOT MUNDY
W. TOWNEND
HENRY OYEN
SAMUEL A. WHITE
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON
HAPSBURG LIEBE
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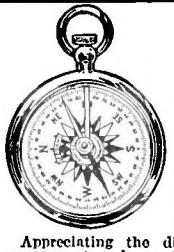

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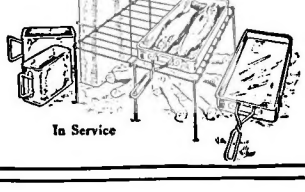

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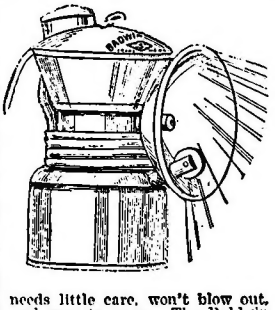

Sitting in your den, planning your next camping trip, you are mighty likely to forget the most important thing — something to **light** the camp at night. You won't miss it 'til you come in sopping wet that first rainy night and burn your fingers trying with feeble matches to dig up those dry socks.

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Contents for May 1915

Cover Design . . . . . **Francis Miller**

The Boss' Daughter ***A Complete Novel*** . . . . . **William West** 3
A 90-horsepower motor-race story of men who never slow down for curves and can blister the bricks of any "straightaway." You shift into high speed on the very first page and rocket through to the flag with the exhaust wide open.

A Temporary Trade in Titles . . . . . **Talbot Mundy** 49
Did the other fellow's job ever look good to you? *Charlie Ross* was a Yankee sheriff, but longed to be a Lord; *Sam Poole*, a Lord, was willing to be Sheriff. They traded for a day, and *Charlie* entertained the stuffiest little Duke in all England.

The Azoic Law ***A Tale of Dawson Days*** . . . . . **Samuel Alexander White** 60
We knew *Sark* and *Bassett* were wanted by *Adventure* readers. But they are making an even larger hit than we expected. Here they are turning a glacier into gold and building an Alaskan city.

Under False Colors . . . . . **Rudolph R. Krebs** 75
Big stakes and a clever, desperate game. Also, a girl who springs a surprise that will knock you as cold as it did "The Gentleman."

A Question of Brains . . . . . **E. A. Morphy** 83
Also of nerve. Grim humor in the face of death.

The Man-Trail ***A Four-Part Story Part II.*** . . . . . **Henry Oyen** 91
When a young six-footer, to prove himself a man, gets a throat-hold on forces that the big woods throw against him, something is bound to snap. *Jack Mud* got this hold and wrestled with odds none had dared to face—partly for himself, partly for a red-blooded girl of the North. If you haven't read Part I, the synopsis will start you along the trail.

The Man from Home . . . . . **Gordon McCreagh** 122
Meet "*Holy*" *Holly*. He can run off a whole circus in an Indian jungle—and he does. Even wild monkeys bow to the magic tongue of "*Holy*."

A Modern Flying Dutchman . . . . . **Wilbur Daniel Steele** 133
A startling, deep mystery of the sea, and the way in which it was solved.

Flower of Battle . . . . . **Joseph Mills Hanson** 141
A grim, to-the-last-shot stand against Indians on the sun-baked plains of our early West.

The Obscure Move . . . . . **Charles Wadsworth Camp** 154
The hunting of a man in the tangle of a Florida swamp.

(Continued on next page)

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(Continued from preceding page)

The Veiled Samaritan . . . . . **Thomas Samson Miller** 162
A man staked all to wring wealth and fame from Africa. But he fell in with a woman—the sort that can rob a man. And there came another—the kind that can save one.

The Reward . . . . . **J. Allan Dunn** 170
Big-hearted *Sandy Bourke* lopes into *Adventure* on the trail of two stage-robbers. One of the West's chap-clad noblemen is *Sandy*—the kind you choose as a pal. And you'll be meeting him again.

Range Broke *Poem* . . . . . **Mary Carolyn Davies** 128

Soldiers of Steel . . . . . **Hapsburg Liebe** 183
Which shows the stuff of which United States soldiers are made.

The Steeple Climbers . . . . . **William Frank Lehman** 189
You'll taste smoke yourself before finishing this tale of high-ladder fire-fighters.

Charley Brown of Lambeth *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **W. Townend** 195
How a man who toed the brink of despair learned the vital lesson of his life: What keeps a man battling when he knows he can not win? Mr. Townend lets you deep into the heart of a pugilist and gives you a ring-fight that is real.

The American Legion, Endorsed by ex-President Roosevelt and Major-General Leonard Wood. **The Development Into a National Movement of the Organization Started and Built Up by This Magazine** 217

The Camp-Fire **A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers** 221

SLED WHEELER IS BACK!

In the next issue of *Adventure*, June, out May 3d, you'll find "The Crimson Chamber," a full book-length novel by Dr. John I. Cochrane in which *Dan*, or "*Sled*," *Wheeler* grapples with the strongest enemies and the biggest mystery he has yet encountered. The events set forth in "The Crook and the Doctor," "Cupid and the Crook," and the other tales of *Dan Wheeler* were sufficiently exciting, but this goes them one better. Backing *Dan* is the nameless and mysterious secret order, but against him are heavier odds than he ever faced before—the Crimson Chamber and the unknown powers behind it. *Dr. Corbin*, whom we first met as doctor in the Blackwell's Island prison, New York City, is again an ally of *Dan's* and also works out his own fate. If you want a *really* exciting story, here it is.

TALBOT MUNDY

In "The Dove with the Broken Wing" Talbot Mundy takes us back to India and into the affairs of certain private soldiers worth knowing. The dove in question is the bird of peace.

"THE REFORMATION OF CARABAO"

Here's a tale of American soldiers in the Philippines by Robert J. Pearsall that is quite likely to stick in your mind.

"PETER KNOWLES RETIRES"

They thought *Peter Knowles* was too old to run his business any longer. That started a most unusual and exciting series of events. If *you* want to start something, try not to laugh when you read it.

ALSO

Turn to the last page in this issue to see what else the June *Adventure* has in store for you.

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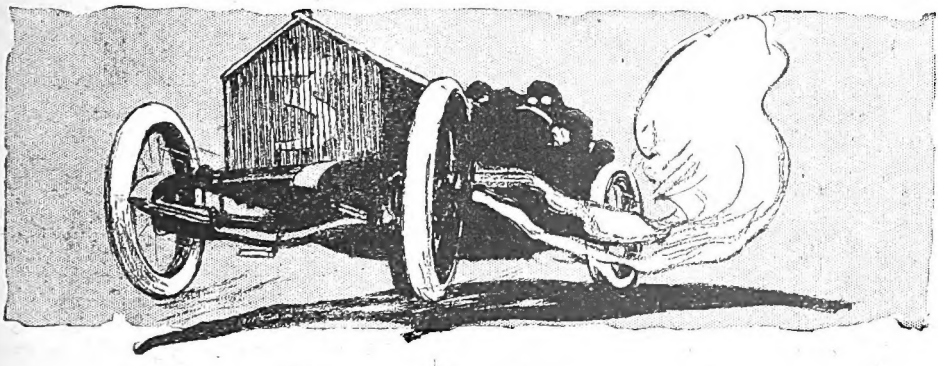

The Boss' Daughter

A Complete Novel

by William West

Author of "The Range Rider."

HENRY MACDONALD was full of ambition and a sense of importance as he walked down Main Street toward the Crescent factory, where he was to report for work, but his dreams of fame and fortune did not prevent his keeping an eye open for purely esthetic comprehensions. As he passed a very large garage and repair shop of brick and concrete and plate-glass, he noted with one eye the splashed and roughened gray body of a test-car, whose radiator told him it was made by the concern whose hireling he was soon to become, while with the other he appraised a young woman who came from the garage and proceeded to climb into the car beside the grimy and begoggled driver.

The car was not esthetic, but the young woman was, and the contrast between her pulchritude and the shabbiness of the machine served to enhance the former. Henry was conscious of a feeling of envy and disgust that one so lovely should be placed in close contact with a mechanic whose oily clothes could do nothing but defile her.

At the same time Henry looked upon that test-car as something to be attained through work and achievement. It was a goal for himself and a chariot of glory whose wheel symbolized honor like a decoration or a medal. He intended some day, soon, to hold one of those cord-wrapped wheels in his own sinewy hands and nurse a snorting power-plant at breakneck speeds over incredibly rough roads and hazardous lanes.

He was going to be another Hassan, who not only designed and built mighty engines but guided them fearlessly to victory on the brick ovals or over the twisting courses of the road classics. Fame and fortune were

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to be his, and in his mind's eye he already saw the first step of that climb to be the rude seat and crude body of a test-car. But when he drove a tester and picked up a fairy in open-work shirtwaist and ratine skirt he would see to it that the manly grime of grueling toil should first be removed from his person.

Above all things Henry was a gentleman and he regarded the appearance of the tester whom he had just seen as evidence that the latter was a "roughneck," utterly lacking in all finer perceptions.

Henry arrived at the entrance to the main factory building where the famous Crescents were built at almost the same time as the test-car he had observed farther up the street. The young lady was just alighting from the seat and Henry at once decided that she must be the daughter of the president of the company, at least, come to pay him a visit and perhaps look over the plant.

This idea caused Henry to hurry, for he thought with cunning that he might obtain admission to the office of the great man at about the same time the girl did, and so win an introduction to her and perhaps receive an invitation to call at an early period. A fleeting vision of orange-blossoms and a view of himself as successor to the headship of the Crescent factory clouded his mind for a second.

Then the young woman turned from the test-car and hurried so quickly into the factory entrance that she almost collided with Henry who stepped quickly out of her way and blushed.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, though she ought to have begged his.

The young woman, already a divinity to him, turned a dazzling complexion full upon him and showed white teeth in a frank but somewhat anxious smile.

"Don't mention it, Babe!" she said, "but give me gangway like a dear. I got to get on my job before the whistle toots."

At this moment the whistle tooted and the divinity vanished in a wild leap that left him only an impression of wonder that a skirt so tight could enable one to move so quickly. The mechanic in the test-car yawned and stretched before throwing in his gears and moving off upon his day's work. It was evident to Henry that he had misjudged the young woman's position in the world and, though his vision had to be suddenly modified, still he acknowledged a feeling of pleasure that he was to be privileged to toil in the same institution as the young lady whose eyes and smile had upset his judgment and heart.

He entered the factory where the stanchest and fastest stock-cars in America were built, with his heart beating with throbs of half delightful pain as were wont to accompany his entrance upon the football field before the whistle blew for an important game in those days that were now behind him forever. His meeting with Mr. Tredeker of the Crescent Manufacturing Company was to mark his entrance into a more absorbing and important game, the game of life and strife and intoxicating success. His mouth, however, felt dry and harsh just as if beginning a career were the same as lining up for the first scrimmage.

WHEN he entered and asked a gentleman who bent over a desk near the door and had discarded a coat in order to work harder where Mr. Tredeker was to be found, at the same time giving his name and expecting the coatless gentlemen to summon an office boy and have his presence duly announced, he received his first shock. The coatless gentleman glanced up at him and stuck his pen back of his ear.

"Up one flight turn to your right and walk in where the sign says 'President.' If the old man ain't there sit down and wait."

Hardly giving himself time to note the utter lack of punctuation in the coatless gentleman's conversation, Henry obeyed, somewhat dazed to comprehend the strange lack of formality that these directions implied. As he began the ascent of the stairs he saw the divinity of the test-car enter the big room at the rear and, before sitting down at a desk on which there was a typewriter and a stack of letters, give a final pat and twist to her crown of amber hair.

She glanced up as she settled herself in her chair and winked at him with the effect of sending him hurriedly on his way, blushing with a sense of guilty elation and thrilled with the first conviction that he was a man to be noted by the fairer sex.

"Some class to that guy," said Miss Marcella Parker to her neighbor on the right. "I bet he ain't never been far from mother, Lucetta."

"I like to see a kid as simple as all that in these days," replied Miss Lucetta. "Believe me, dearie, the boys is wised up so

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nowadays that you'd think they was all raised in incubators and hadn't never had no mothers. Now that guy would be real sweet if his nose wasn't so sharp and he'd wear a cerise tie."

Unmindful of this approval, Henry went on his way to the office of the great man who had so shrewdly obtained first call upon his services, even before he had completed his two years' post-graduate work for a master's degree; only two weeks before, be it noted, but the fact showed Henry that his fame was already beginning to permeate the world of motordom. And the action of Mr. Tredeker had sealed his status with Henry. It was certain that the head of the Crescent factory was a genius and a gigantic intellect.

However, if the stout gentleman in the gray suit of wide checks, who wore a soft hat shoved over one ear, fully exposing a red countenance which was decorated with a cigar that stuck up beside his nose at about the same angle that marked his feet, which were elevated upon a desk, was the redoubtable Tredeker, his appearance did not bear out Henry's estimate of him. Mr. Tredeker looked anything but the genius, and his intellect, if his forehead were any criterion, was about that of a successful alderman of a tough ward. Henry thought that some salesman must have entered the sanctum and usurped the great man's chair while awaiting his return from an errand of moment.

But the stout gentleman in checks stared at Henry and spoke without removing the cigar, which gave his utterance a quality of thickness that further added to the impression of ward-healer jauntiness that surrounded him.

"If you got anything on your mind, kid," he said, "loosen it up! Loosen it up!"

"I'm looking for Mr. Tredeker," said Henry timidly.

"Well, lamp me good while you're easing your chest," remarked the other. "But get it over now. I ain't got all day. What's the trouble?"

"Are you Mr. Tredeker?" asked Henry, and his voice might have showed that he was skeptical.

"I'm the guy!" assented the other as he removed the cigar long enough to spit, which he did without any reference to the shining brass cuspidor beside the desk. "What you got? A line of stationery? Not in the market!"

"My name's MacDonald," said Henry helplessly. He now realized that his divinity could never have been the daughter of such a man as this.

"Glad to hear it," said Mr. Tredeker. "But the fact won't sell anything here. Go down and see Mose Haskins."

It took the stupified Henry a few seconds to realize that Mr. Tredeker did not remember his name at all.

"Why!" he said stammering a little. "I'm not selling anything, Mr. Tredeker. I thought—I'm just out of Tech' and I was employed—at least I understood that I was to have a position in this factory."

"Oh!" said Mr. Tredeker. "Oh! Well, that puts a different light on the matter. You're the guy those professors picked to wish on me, are you? Name of MacDonald, hay? Well, I'm glad to see you and I hope you like the place. When you going to work?"

"I reported here to find out," said Henry helplessly.

"Y'ought to reported to Walker at the shops," said Mr. Tredeker dubiously. "*I* don't know what he wants with you. Said he was going to get a young fellow or two from the colleges to break in. All foolishness, I say. They'll come in here and expect to show all of us how to build cars before they've learned the difference between a roller-bearing and a drop-forging. I told Walker so, too, but he never would listen to reason. Says the game needs technical men and he wants to train 'em himself."

This was news to Henry. He had supposed that Mr. Tredeker himself had heard of his work and hastened to secure his valuable services before some rival got ahead of him. If the case were different, however, he knew what to do. It was up to him to overcome the prejudice which it was evident Mr. Tredeker harbored against technical men and to replace it with an abiding admiration.

Stray surmises of the great man's awe and astonishment if he could only know what his despised apprentice even now could bring him tinged Henry's outlook with rosy hues. But discretion counseled him to go easy with this philistine. Time enough to betray his momentous secret when his status had been established by other means. Meantime he would go to see this man Walker, evidently the head designer, who must be of another and less skeptical mind

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toward the college-bred product, as was evidenced by the fact that he had secured Henry's valuable services.

"I hope I can prove Mr. Walker right," said Henry with well-simulated humility. "I'm sorry to have troubled you and I'll go and look him up and see when he wants me to pitch in."

"No hurry about it at all," said Mr. Tredeker, who in fact gave the impression that he never hurried about anything. "Since you're here we might as well have a talk. I'd like to know something about your notions of the motor business, since you're going to work for me. Smoke?"

Henry declined the proffered cigar and wondered what Mr. Tredeker really desired of him. As a matter of fact Mr. Tredeker desired nothing but to pass a few moments in quizzing a young man from whom he anticipated raw and half-baked ideas. Mr. Tredeker knew very little about the motor business himself in reality, and conscious of the fact desired to impress an inexperienced youth with quite the contrary idea.

"Never been in the practical end of this business, have you?" he asked patronizingly, after Henry had refused the smoke.

"I've never built any cars, if that's what you mean," said Henry. "I worked in the Dampièrre laboratories for two years after I graduated, but that was in the line of tests and experiments."

"After you graduated?" repeated Tredeker. "I thought you was just out of school."

"I have just finished two years' extra work at college for a master's degree," explained Henry with some pride. "I graduated in Mechanical Engineering about five years ago. My thesis was published in *The Mechanical Age*, and you may have noticed it."

Tredeker eyed him with suspicion and snorted.

"It sure escaped my notice," he said with elaborate sarcasm. "What's this Dampair laboratory you're talking about? Some chemical shop?"

Henry's mouth dropped open. He was torn between horror at such ignorance and a doubt that it could be genuine. He forced an artificially appreciative laugh.

"Hah, hah!" he ejaculated. "Pretty good, Mr. Tredeker. Never heard of Dampièrre! I guess you never heard of the Schultz heavy-duty motor, either."

"Yes, I've heard of that," admitted Tredeker coolly. "Read the other day that the Government was going to put them in the new ships. But what's that got to do with this drug-store you're talking about?"

Henry felt a distinct shock as it was borne in on him that Tredeker's ignorance was no joke.

"Nothing," he said helplessly, "except that Schultz and Dampièrre worked it all out in the test laboratory in Rouen. It was Schultz's idea, of course, but he'd never have made a go of it if it hadn't been for the laboratory where they could test out every theory. I guess there hasn't been a motor made in France that Dampièrre hasn't had something to do with. They don't work in the dark over there, you know. They know what they are doing before they do it."

"And we do work in the dark, I suppose," said Tredeker. "Well, we manage to build pretty good cars in spite of the fact, and I haven't noticed any foreigners walking off with the Cosmopolitan Sweepstakes as yet. Us natives manage to keep that here in spite of their laboratories."

"They haven't been after it yet," said Henry warmly. "Wait until they send over some of their cars and real drivers and go after it. I'll bet the natives won't be so sure they're right after that."

Now Mr. Tredeker had one abiding pride and faith. He was proud of the conviction that no cars could be built that would "stand up" with the native product, and his faith was pinned on one article; that no car could every break the Speedway record now held by an American car until it would be done by the Crescent. It made him rabid to differ with him in these opinions in ever so slight a degree.

"Young man," said he, as his cigar took on a more belligerent tilt, "you may be a P. G. or a P. D. Q. or an N. G., and you may know all about laboratories and drug-stores and such truck, but let me tell you that it don't go in this place. What we want is men that get down and learn to build cars from the ground up and we don't want young fellers that come here fresh from some school and undertake to tell us how to put a motor together. We learned that long ago.

"What *you* want to do is to go down in those shops and get your hands greasy, throw castings around until you get some

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meat on your bones, scrub up the floors and drag trucks around; in short, learn the automobile business from the ground up. I'll bet you can't even drive a stripped roadster a mile a minute on a straight road without getting the shakes. It don't make no difference what they do in France, young feller. What we do over here is the question—and the sooner you get that the better you'll get along in this shop."

Henry wanted to argue the question, but he decided that to do so would show lack of tact.

"I'm not going to try to teach you your business, Mr. Tredeker," he said humbly. "I know I can learn a lot here and I'm sure I'm willing to learn. To prove it I'll go and report to Mr. Walker at once and waste no more of your time."

"Humph!" snorted the disgruntled Tredeker. "I reckon you better and I hope Walker has sense enough to take some of them ideas outa your nut before he signs you on permanently. And don't you talk laboratories to Verrens until you've been out with him on a test run, or he'll have it in for you. I reckon after that you'll allow that we have pretty good laboratories right here on the roads of this State."

Henry made his escape, not stopping to inquire further regarding Verrens. He was sore and disillusioned. If Mr. Tredeker were a great builder of motor-cars, his conduct belied him. He knew the Crescent car from rear to front shackle-bolt and had a conviction that there were things about it that he could improve if given a chance.

Besides that, there was his great secret which would have made the Crescent the greatest car in the world but which he now believed would likely meet with only skepticism and scorn from such men as Tredeker. He was patriotic and wished above all things that his discovery should benefit his own countrymen, but his heart sank at the idea that they might repeat on him the treatment they had given Cavalier and his rotary-valve engine not so long before.

But Walker, who had had discrimination enough to pick him out from all others and offer him this position, must be of another stamp. He plucked up courage as it was borne in on him that Tredeker might be a great financier and seller of cars, but certainly could know little of the building end and so might be excused for his contempt of theory and science. He hurried through the offices and back into the shops to find Walker.

II

THE turmoil and noise of the factory smote on Henry's ears with a welcome sound. His nostrils dilated at the familiar smell of oil and leather and his ears tingled with the rattle of metals and the whir of lathes. This was home to him and there was not a machine in the place that he could not have turned inside out and put together again. He stopped to observe a grimy man who bent assiduously over a great lathe, and a boy with a truck swung it deftly so close to his legs that he could feel the scrape of it on his trousers.

"Gangway, sport!" roared the boy, expecting to see him leap wildly from the danger.

But Henry only bent slightly out of the way and pushed the yelling imp to one side.

"Where's Mr. Walker?" he demanded with sternness.

"I ain't no directory," replied the boy and went off about his business, which seemed to consist of making as much noise as he found practicable.

Henry wandered on and noticed many things that stuck in his mind. For some of the processes he observed he found a note of approval, but for others there was contempt in his mind. They could systematize this and that, he thought; and this lathe was of an old style, while that method of riveting belts was superseded abroad by a much better one. And here was a man who was turning cylinders; a good workman, but there was an illusive, infinitesimal air of routine about him, a mechanical method that seemed to hint at a day's work to be done and gotten over with.

Turning a cylinder should be an art and not a task. And the assembling wasn't what it should have been. They seemed thorough enough, and Henry well knew that where parts were so thoroughly standardized, putting them together did not require the skill that obtained where they were machined separately for each car, but even so, it seemed to him that the men engaged on this work performed it perfunctorily.

Yet the Crescent was a good car, as he would be the last to deny, and there might be virtue in such methods, since they resulted in the production of the stock

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champion of them all. But they didn't do it that way at Dampièrre's.

He had come down to the ground floor to find the assembling-shops, where some one had said that Walker would probably be found. The doors were open to the street and as he looked around, a car, the same that he had seen before entering the factory, rolled into the entrance and was drawn up while the begrimed and goggled driver climbed from his seat. The mud and dust on its rough body told of a hard drive, and the spattered tester looked as if he were glad to have done with it.

"Stiff as my old maid aunt," he groaned, as he stretched himself. "Loosen up the steering-knuckle, boys, and drown her in a little oil. I can't tool that hack the way it is."

"D'you want to see me," said a voice at Henry's elbow, as he admired and envied the tester. "What's wanted, please?"

Henry turned to face a foxy, lean man whose eyes showed care and burdens. He hardly had time to notice that the man's face seemed lacking in candor before the recollection of his errand came back to him.

"I'm looking for Mr. Walker," he said. "Are you the man?"

"Yes," answered the other. "What can I do for you?"

Henry made known his name and errand and the engineer nodded with what the young man thought was strange lack of enthusiasm. His reception from first to last had the effect of disillusioning and chilling him. It was being rapidly borne in upon his intelligence that he was not at all the important and desired cog in this machine that he had thought he was destined to be.

"I remember your name," said the lean man. "I guess you know that you've got to start at the bottom here and work up. Don't know what we'll do with you just yet. Potter around and get used to the place and I'll see Verrens after a while and find a place to start you."

SO HENRY, feeling lonely and strange, wandered from point to point in the factory, noting the methods and equipment with an appraising eye. On the whole, he found little to cavil at, though there seemed to be more or less lack of system. From foundry to assembly-room he strolled, through three roomy floors of machinery and busy workmen.

The testing machines caught his eye and here he was disappointed. There were machines for determining tensile strengths and crushing weights, but to his mind not enough of them nor of sufficiently diversified character. But he reflected that the Crescent was, after all, one of the best of American cars, and that his too critical attitude could not alter that fact. But if he could have a free hand in this shop there would be some changes of moment made in it. Wait until he had negotiated with them to use his secret and then he would be able to dictate changes in method to his heart's content.

He had been strolling from one place to another for an hour and at last found himself back in the assembling-room. Here they had just finished making some adjustments on the bedraggled test-car that had come in at the same time that he had entered and the driver was about ready to take his seat once more in it. In looking about he observed Henry and promptly beckoned to him.

"Climb in, kid," he said. "I'll run you around in this 'bus for a while and then see what we'll do with you."

Henry hesitated. He hardly knew what authority the grimy man in overalls and goggles held over him. He had slight inclination to be ordered about by some mechanic.

"Come on!" said the man a little impatiently. "I'm Verrens, and Walker told me to take hold of you. Hop in now and don't keep me waitin' all day."

So Henry, still bewildered, climbed into place beside the driver and watched him ease in his gears and throw his clutch with something like fascination. Many a motor had he run on a test-block and every minute part of one was familiar to him, but, strangely enough, he had never actually handled a car from the driver's seat. He had ridden as a passenger, but not even that as much as most people in this day. Absorbed in work and research and poorly provided with wealth, his life had lain in the shops and not on the roads. So there was something mysterious and tantalizing in the easy familiarity with which Verrens manipulated his powerful engine.

AS THEY rolled through the streets the thrill that the motion gave Henry was altogether pleasurable and he fairly reveled in the thought that,

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some day in the near future, he too would sit behind a wheel and guide a monster mechanism over the roads, listening and feeling for every defect in the apparatus. He was listening now with trained and acute ear, seeking telltale indications of fault in the smooth purr of the motor and the creak and rattle of frame and struts. He heard nothing, but he well knew that hearing alone would not locate all failures. One had to hold the wheel and feel the car answering to the hand before one could pronounce it good.

"What you know about motors?" asked Verrens, as he glanced carelessly and somewhat patronizingly at Henry. "I hear you're just out of school."

Henry reflected with displeasure that these people seemed to regard an institution for technical education as of about the same caliber as a high school. What did he know about motors? He hugged his secret to his bosom and felt a contempt for this rule-of-thumb mechanic who was so complacently superior.

"Nothing much," he said with the idea of being subtly ironical, but entirely overshooting the mark. "I know more about French engines than American."

"Well, there's no getting 'round it, the foreigners build some good engines," admitted Verrens as if he were being very broad-minded and demonstrating his freedom from prejudice. "But they wouldn't stand up on our roads, I reckon."

"Probably not," said Henry, again intending irony and again overshooting.

He felt that further conversation with this fellow would irritate him and he accordingly did not continue. As for Verrens, he felt that drawing admissions of ignorance from a young fellow fresh from a school was poor sport and beneath his dignity. He was a little annoyed that Walker had "ditched" the greenhorn on to him and little enough inclined to be friendly. So he drove on out until the paved streets ran into country roads, turning and going at about thirty miles an hour until, in a few minutes, they ran past the high, white board fence that surrounded the great oval of the Speedway. He slowed down at the main gates and handed a key to Henry.

"We'll try a spin or two on the track," he said. "Get down and swing the gates for me."

Henry obeyed with a thrill as he realized that he was about to behold and drive upon the scene of the great classic of motor racing, where the best cars and drivers of the world were wont to compete once each year. He sprang again to his seat as the car rolled to a stop inside the gates that he swung behind it, and looked eagerly at the long, bare line of grand-stands that they passed behind until they came to the tunnel under the track. Through this they rushed and up into the vast inclosure of the field, where he could get a view of the enormous brick track, stretching like a ribbon through the straightaway and swaying in a mighty sweep of banked brick around the curves.

Deserted and barren as it was, Henry sensed some impression of shouting thousands cheering on the roaring, smoke-hazed monsters and their famous, reckless drivers as they fought for the lead through endless laps at demoniac speed. If he could live to the day when he, too, would sit behind the hood of a racer and urge it on to victory and fortune! If he could drive! If he could only drive!

"Take the wheel and give her a spin, kid," said the bored voice of Verrens. "Let's see how you push her."

Henry came to earth with a sickening qualm. He almost gulped in this bitter reminder of incompetence. He could not drive.

He was on the point of admitting the fact when a wave of shame forbade him. He knew the car—knew every rivet that went into it, and every function of every part probably better than did this conceited mechanic who patronized him. A little nerve and a little manual skill was all that he needed to make him a driver. He would not acknowledge that he had never held a wheel in his life.

Half fearfully he arose to climb over the shifted knees of Verrens and edge into his vacated seat. He was aware that his heart was beating fearfully and that his skin was creeping on his spine, while his throat and mouth were dry as sand. But he gave these symptoms little thought. They were, after all, mere exaggerations of the feelings that had held him when they had turned into the country roads and let out the motor to a speed of thirty miles. He had thought that was merely exhilaration and this, if it were not that, was something akin to it. If it felt strangely like fear, he did not heed.

"I'm not much good as a driver," he

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stammered, finding difficulty in keeping his voice from trembling. "I've never done much of it."

"Well, take hold and let her out," replied Verrens tolerantly. "It won't bite you!"

The engine had been left running and all he had to do was advance his spark and ease in his low. It was a simple operation and one that he was entirely familiar with, but in spite of this his hand and arm shook and felt weak, and the motion was at first absurdly feeble and then, in a panic, too abrupt.

The gears clashed alarmingly and the car leaped viciously forward. He forgot his wheel and narrowly missed the boarded side of the pits as he swerved toward the gateway to the track. Barely in time he swung into the open way and rolled up to the smooth surface. But he forgot again, in his relief, to swing his wheel and nearly went into the wire fence across the track. He had to reverse and here again he was clumsy. Verrens watched it all with a grin of derision on his face.

Desperately Henry got the car headed approximately right and slowly drove it around the track. He crept along at about ten miles an hour, striving to overcome the numbness of his hands and their tendency to cling desperately to the cord-wrapped wheel.

"Speed her up!" growled Verrens. "This ain't no funeral, is it?"

Henry swallowed hard again and slid into high. But for some time he hesitated to open the throttle any further. At last he responded to the disgusted look of his companion and pushed it forward. The car picked up and spun ahead and he clamped the wheel and held on with desperation, holding it rigidly to the curves.

"I reckon," said Verrens coldly, "that you had better let me drive this 'bus. It ain't much of a test that you're givin' her."

Henry gratefully threw off his clutch and slowed down, painfully conscious of the fact that he was trembling and perspiring. He climbed back into his original place without a word and mopped his face with his handkerchief.

Verrens, without looking at Henry, threw the clutch in and the throttle wide open. The car leaped into its speed and swept madly around the curves and into the back stretch. Here was nearly a mile of straight track and Verrens, disgusted and angry, crowded on all the power the engine had and drove like mad. The Crescent had a motor of tremendous potential, and the stock-cars were built on chassis that were strong enough to stand the grind of racing. The light testing-body was no drag to it, and the car soon was roaring along at over eighty miles an hour.

Now Henry awoke to a new sensation. At first he had been so relieved at relinquishing the wheel that he had not heeded the speed, but as the great machine picked up and began to roar and throb down the stretch, he suddenly became aware that all the thrills he had previously felt were being magnified and crystallized into a cold and desperate terror. Unreasoning, overwhelming, senseless, it mounted and grew in him until he wanted to scream and would have done so if he had had the strength.

But he was utterly impotent, powerless to do ought but turn his staring eyes and white, desperate face to the driver, and clutch the sides of his flimsy seat with the strength of death. He felt that he should faint if the speed did not slacken. He wanted to let go and reach out for the throttle. He could not tear his frozen arms from the seat.

His head swam and the frightful fear overwhelmed him. And then he heard the loud and astonished laugh, sounding distant but as if tremendously magnified, that Verrens emitted as a chance glance turned sideways betrayed his companion's condition to him. Then came the welcome sound of grinding brakes and spinning engine as the car slowed down. His head began to clear, though there was still a reddish mist before his eyes.

"Haw, haw!" roared Verrens from out the fog that surrounded him. "Durned if the yellow-livered cuss ain't in a cold sweat! Oh, gosh! Ain't it a bird!"

III

THE general verdict of the factory was that the young college man had been tried and found wanting. The story of his terror and incompetence lost nothing in Verrens' telling, and the description of his hair-raising efforts on every turn at a street corner, to further paralyze the cowardly passenger, gained all the force and power of an epic before he had arrived at its repetition to Miss Marcella Parker, when he escorted her home that evening. And as

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Miss Parker was summoned to the sanctum of the president in order to take a letter the next morning (his own stenographer being absent) an opportunity was furnished to make the great man acquainted with the shortcomings of MacDonald.

Meantime, what the verdict would be was being gently broken to the hapless Henry. When he had finally achieved the refuge of the testing-room after untold suffering from terrors which abased his very soul, he knew that he was henceforth an object of scorn and contempt. His dreams of fame at the wheel of a racing-car had evaporated into a substance thinner than air could possibly be.

It added nothing to his comfort to have Verrens grinningly tell him, with biting irony, that he didn't think he was quite ripe yet for the testing department and that he'd better start in at something more lowly. What this was soon appeared, for Verrens, before Henry left for his rooming-house, called the superintendent of the shops and turned Henry over to him.

"He ain't a bit of use to me and he's got to learn the whole thing from the ground up," he explained to Mr. Carr, the superintendent. "Walker says to put him at anything he can do, and he can't do nothing that I can see. I was going to start him washin' the cars, but I'm afraid he'll spoil the enamel. He ain't ripe for my department, and you'll have to start him pullin' a truck or something like that."

Mr. Carr was a busy and harassed man and he knew little of Henry's status, so was inclined to take Verrens' word for the facts. And Henry was too subdued to dispute the tester. Accordingly the latter said nothing and maintained a humble and submissive attitude, though there was a hot feeling growing in his breast and some sullen resentment was mounting through the overlying crust of shame.

"All right," said Mr. Carr briskly. "Report at seven tomorrow and get your card. Seventeen cents an hour."

It did not dawn on Henry in his dazed condition what this meant. He made his way homeward and was glad that he could escape before the factory hands and office force were relieved, so that he did not have to run the gauntlet of their eyes. And, as his humiliation grew less acute with time, his anger mounted in him. He would show them! And that Verrens should pay for the indignities he had heaped on him. What was he, anyway? Nothing but the head tester—a mechanic whose ability was represented by some rule-of-thumb knowledge of the rudiments of mechanics. There would be a reckoning for that fellow.

HE CAME grimly to work in the morning, clad in old clothes and overalls, and sought out the superintendent. Mr. Carr had impressed him as a more capable man than either Walker or Verrens, and he had hopes that he would meet with more discernment on his part. But Carr was busy, as usual, and had no time to waste on one who was extremely insignificant from his point of view.

"Johnny, show this fellow a truck and put him to hauling castings," he shouted. "See you later," he added to Henry and turned away.

Henry was chagrined to find that the mentor to whom he had been assigned was no other than the loud-mouthed boy who, on the occasion of his first visit to the factory, had endeavored to scrape his legs off with the edge of his truck; and the superior grin that this imp greeted him with let him know that the story of his cowardice had penetrated to the depths and that his reputation was low indeed with even this hireling of the company.

"Come on, Cully," said the boy patronizingly. "I'll show yer a nice, gentle, lady-broke truck that won't turn on you and bite you if you treat it kind. Here's one here that ain't too high-spirited fer you, if you're keerful with it and don't go to yankin' it around too careless."

Henry looked the boy over carefully. He was a well-grown lad of about eighteen and really larger than Henry. His life had lain in lines of manual labor and he was hardy of muscle.

"Where," said Henry carefully, "are the castings I'm to load and where am I to take them?"

The boy gave the information with additional gibes and witticisms. Henry kept an even face throughout. But when he had gained the required information he reached out, grasped the collar of his tormentor and kicked him some ten feet forward, where he fell upon his face and slid, to the detriment of his complexion, the floor being of cement.

Following this, which raised a laugh from some of the men who were working within

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sight, he yanked the handle of his truck in a manner that showed he was thoroughly familiar with the handling of it, and strode off toward the pile of castings that had been indicated to him. The rough foundrymen eyed him a little doubtfully while the boy, somewhat surprised, found his wits to bellow invectives after him.

Henry paid no heed to either, but swung a heavy casting from the pile and dropped it with a vicious bang upon the truck. Discrimination might have led those who saw him to wonder at the ease with which he did this and to take warning from it, but the workers, brought up to physical toil, could see in a college-bred youth with a pale face only a physical weakling. When he had loaded a couple of castings he swung the truck deftly to start it and walked back toward the turning-lathes.

The lad who had met his vengeance was waiting for him. He had stopped to wipe his skinned face and to tell one or two others what he was going to do with the sport, and now lay in wait for Henry. He rushed upon him as he bent forward against the weight of the truck and shot a leg forth to trip him, which might well have resulted in serious injury in case the truck ran upon his helpless body.

But Henry stepped out of the way of the rush and, swinging the iron handle of the truck away from himself, let it drop to the floor, where, after the manner of such implements, it snaked sideways and ran deftly between the feet of the belligerent Johnny. It knocked that worthy's feet from under him, and it was only by an acrobatic effort of admirable quickness that he threw his hands forward upon the body of the truck and escaped being run down.

"Now," said Henry coldly, as Johnny drew his damaged features from the contact with the iron that his hasty leap had involved, "if you'll get off of that and stand up here, I'll knock you down again—and I'll do the same for any other dad-swizzled, condemned joker that thinks he can get funny with me. I'm waiting for any one that wants to try it."

There was something about Henry at that moment that counseled discretion to all observers. The men who stood around, and who did not care a lot for Johnny anyhow, passed his challenge with hoots for the victim of the accident and an adjuration or two directed at Henry, advising him to "keep his shirt on" and offering the information that no one was hurting him.

"And they better not, either," said Henry solemnly, as he spit on his hands and picked up the handle of the truck. "I can lick any one of you for doughnuts, marbles or chalk, and don't you forget it, either."

The marvel of it was that they took him at his word and, though it was known that he had shown cowardice in the test-car, not one of them doubted that it would be dangerous to try to impose upon him. Perhaps it was his efficient way of tooling the truck which betrayed his prowess or it may have been sheer moral force alone, but the men in the foundry, husky toilers every one of them, forgot his pallor of face and texture of skin and henceforth gave him full meed of respect.

But they ordered him about more than was good for his sorely tried temper. To them he was merely a lowly apprentice, probably destined for higher things than themselves, but, as long as he was beneath their authority, one to be lorded over and patronized if only that in after years each one could boast that he had "taught" a distinguished man most of what he knew.

This roiled Henry, for he was firmly convinced that there was nothing under the heavens that these men could teach him. In this he was wrong, for they gave him some examples of restraint and good temper that he failed to profit by.

ON THE third day of his degrading toil he had an opportunity. A man who was handling a big punch which required some manual skill wished for relief. There was no one about who could take the machine while he snatched his lunch, and he expressed his resentment of the fact within the hearing of Henry.

"Go on and eat," said Henry promptly. "I'll run that thing for you while you feed."

"Hey?" said the man. "What are you givin' me? Think I'm going to let you play heck with my machine?"

"Play nothing," said Henry unpleasantly. "I can run that thing where you can't begin to feed it."

"Let him rave! The heat's got him!" remarked the mechanic pityingly.

"Ten dollars says I can," hinted Henry suggestively, and pulled a bill from his pocket.

The man eyed this token of confidence

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with respect, for ten dollars was a large sum to him and earnest of tremendous confidence, in itself.

"Ten dollars if I don't run it right," said Henry in a tantalizing tone. "Hold the coin for him, Peters."

He shoved the bill into the hands of an onlooker and pushed himself to a place beside the operator of the machine. The man hesitated, looked at the bill and then around to see if there was a foreman in sight who might visit the breach with punishment. Then he reluctantly stepped back while a group gathered to watch the test.

Henry adjusted the switch and speeded the punch up to a notch higher than had ever been seen in that shop. Then he swept his table-load of pieces into a better position, braced his feet and reached for the first bar. It slid swiftly from right hand to left, and while the punch bit in another followed it into position.

With swift, deft, perfectly timed motions, the steel slid from table to slot and out again to the receptacle which took the finished pieces. His hands fairly flew, but there was never a mistake nor even a hesitancy that could be marked. It was evident to every one that he was a master hand at the work.

"Go on and eat," he cried, without lifting eye from the drumming jaws. "I'll run your output up high enough to give you a day's vacation if you take more than fifteen minutes."

When the man had finished, which he did hurriedly, he came back to his job quite humbly and almost apologized when he slowed down the machine to a speed more consistent with his own ability.

"That's too high for me," he admitted.

" 'S'nothing at all," said Henry. "There isn't a machine in the old shop I can't make eat out of my hand. If any one wants to see me do it, put up a little money to make it interesting and name your own referee."

"Let's see you run this lathe," said a man.

Henry obligingly ran it with a skill and sureness that left nothing to be said. From time to time he operated others, not with the idea of winning the attention of his superiors, for he did not think a skill acquired during a long apprenticeship could be a matter of importance, since his ability was not needed as a mechanic, but solely because his pride and self-conceit were suffering from what he thought was general contempt, and this offered a means of restoring his self-respect and the good opinion of his associates.

That the news of his achievements finally should attract the attention of the superintendent was far from his thoughts. To be able to run a lathe or turn a cylinder, while a desirable accomplishment, had little to do with his ability to design an engine.

But Mr. Carr began to notice him and even gave him a promotion. He was taken from the trucks and put to operating a small and simple punch on the fourth day of his work. That Saturday he went to the office and presented his card. It called for $6.80.

Henry received this huge amount with a wry face. He said nothing at the time, but on the following Monday, when he came to work, he sought out Mr. Carr and presented the envelope with the penciled figures upon it.

"Say," he said, "how long do I have to work at this munificent salary?"

"Until you've learned the business and proved that you're worth more," replied Carr as he looked at the amount, be it said, a little doubtfully.

Henry examined the superintendent thoughtfully. He was slowly learning wisdom. Even more than when he had seen him for the first time Carr impressed him as a different type of man from Walker or Verrens.

"Mr. Carr," he remarked, "I think you're a pretty square man and one with a little sense. Now, honestly, do you think I'm worth all that money?"

Carr failed to meet his eye.

"It isn't much, I admit," he answered. "But you've got to work up. And I'm afraid I can't give you any more at present."

"I've got five hundred dollars saved up," said Henry slowly. "I have to have over a thousand. It costs me more than eight dollars a week for room and board and clothes, and I'm not very extravagant. I don't see where I 'get off' at this salary."

"I'm sorry," said Carr gruffly.

"Do you read *The Mechanical Age?*" asked Henry irrelevantly.

"Sometimes," said Carr.

"Maybe you remember an article on 'The future tendency in internal combustion engines,' that appeared in it a few months ago?"

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"I read it," said Carr. "Some relative of yours?"

"You noted the name, too? Yes it was a relative. In fact it was yours truly that wrote it."

Carr was silent, eying Henry doubtfully. He was prepared to admit that this might be a fact. Several things which had come within his observation indicated as much to him.

"I don't know that a thesis entitles you to a high salary," he said defensively. "There was a lot of good stuff in that and some that I don't agree with, but theory and practise are two different things."

"I don't deny it," said Henry. "But between my theory and the practise in this shop, I'll gamble on my theory. As for practise, I was two years with Dampièrre and *he* thought enough of me to pay me ten thousand francs a year before I quit him, and if you know anything about foreign values you'll admit that he wouldn't have done that to a mere theorizer."

Mr. Carr knew it well and fidgeted under the knowledge.

"I can't help it," he said desperately. "It doesn't rest with me, and you ought to know it. Walker and Verrens have the say and that's all I can tell you here. But if you want to drop up to my place this evening and smoke a bit, maybe we can get to know each other a little better anyway, and you'll not feel that I'm an enemy of yours."

"I don't now," said Henry. "But I must admit that I can't see what Walker and Verrens are trying to do."

IV

SOMEHOW or other Henry could not help feeling that, since his fate appeared to rest in the hands of Walker and Verrens, it was not a promising one. Not for a world would he have gone to either of them with his protest, for he had experienced Verrens' scorn and he distrusted Walker and his fox-like, peaked face. It was one of those unreasoning, instinctive distrusts, for, since that first day, Walker had never even spoken to Henry nor even appeared to notice him.

Carr, however, was of a different stamp, a well-trained, experienced engineer who rather lacked imagination but had plenty of ability in the beaten paths of his profession. A man is bound to accumulate prejudice after years of plugging along in one groove, but Carr was conscientous and honest and fair according to his lights. Henry felt that with him he would be given a square deal and that his hope for recognition lay only in convincing the superintendent of his ability and obtaining his intercession with the Great Man of the company, Mr. Tredeker himself.

Meantime, however, his growing conviction of injury called for sympathy and, being something of a sentimentalist, he turned for it to the gentler sex whose forte it is to be sympathetic without understanding. The only one of that sex whom he knew at all happened to be Miss Marcella Parker, whose casual meeting with him on that first day had led first to exchanged bows and formal greetings and later by gradual degrees to smiles and an occasional remark of more familiar character.

How this had happened Henry could not have told, for he was so shy a man that he would never have made the first overtures toward acquaintance, but Miss Parker, who liked admiration, could have fully explained it if she had cared to. But she was only inclined to hint to her friends that it was due only to her superior attractions which Henry could not resist, and they being envious were wont to ask her what in the name of mercy she could see in *that* little stuck-up baby who couldn't even drive a motor-car and was afraid to hold the wheel of one.

Marcella said that they were mistaken and that, if it were true, there were things she could have told them which would have offset any little drawback like that. Money, she intimated, and Family with a very big F were something to be consisdered.

Henry, having neither money nor family, did not know anything about this, but Verrens heard some of it and disliked Henry more for it. Verrens was extremely attentive to Marcella himself and *he* was firmly convinced that Marcella only flirted with the "college fellow" in order to annoy him.

At any rate Henry now went to Marcella, waiting for that purpose half an hour over his quitting time, since the office force worked until five while the shop men got off at half past four. He felt that he was doing a heoric thing to ask her permission to walk home with her, and his attitude when he appeared before her desk just before she closed it showed more terror and awkwardness than one who faces a dentist for the first time.

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But Marcella, skilled in masculine ways, welcomed this diffidence as a new experience and made it easy for him with consummate wiliness. When it was all over he wondered that he had ever trembled and was so elated and proud that he hardly noticed the fact that her acceptance was only to her father's place of business, whence, it seemed, she would be accompanied farther by another male, whom Henry fatuously concluded must be her parent himself.

"AIN'T IT a perfectly elegant day?" was Marcella's way of beginning a conversation. "It's a regular shame that I got to pound the keys in that stuffy old office when, believe me, I'd a lot rather be out listening to the dickie birds. Many's the time I've been right on the point of telling them to get another girl in my place and quit."

Henry thought he perceived an opening for his own troubles.

"Shame! Of course it's a shame!" he agreed. "It's this darned necessity for chasing the dollar and grubbing for a living that keeps us all down. Not that I kick on having to work for a living."

"Well, of course I don't rightly *have* to work for my living," said Marcella with somewhat of a superior air. "My folks have got money, all right, but the old man is shy on generosity and he thinks I ought to be able to get my clothes and things on the money he gives me, and that's too much to ask of me. Besides, there isn't no fun to be had staying around the house and listening to ma quarreling with the hired girl. She never did get over the habit of doing her own work and she won't let the girl do it now. I don't mean we're so rich, but we ain't so dreadful poor, neither."

"Just working for a little pin-money?" said Henry. It seemed to him that her sympathy and understanding was harder to obtain than he had thought.

"Of course it don't amount to much," said Marcella, "but it helps out until a girl gets married. And one gets more chance to meet nice fellows when she's working. There's some perfectly swell gentlemen in the factory. Mr. Walker has been very nice to me and Mr. Verrens, the head tester, is just lovely! I expect you know him."

"Yes," said Henry grimly, "I know him."

"Then," rattled Marcella, "even Mr. Tredeker likes blondes and he pays me attention sometimes. He's turribly rich, you know."

Henry thought of his six dollars and eighty cents and his anger swelled within him.

"I know he is," he sputtered, "but how he ever got it is beyond me. Here he runs this place with men like Walker and—" the thought that Verrens had been "just lovely" to Marcella deterred him— "and the others like him, and in spite of it makes money hand over fist while he hasn't sense enough to pay a man like me, who can make Walker look like a manual-training student, more than office boy's wages, because I 'have to learn the business from the ground up.' Holy Mackerel! Does he think I can afford to work for seventeen cents an hour?"

The cry of grief went clear over Marcella's head at first. The main thing to her understanding was the fact that the well-dressed young man who was supposed to be slated for important work in the factory was merely drawing seventeen cents an hour, hardly half as much as she herself was paid. Still, she had to keep up her pose of interest until a better opportunity of getting rid of him should present itself.

"The idea!" she exclaimed. "I shouldn't think you would! But then, I don't suppose it really matters to you—the actual money."

"Matter!" cried Henry bitterly. "Matter! I'd like to know who it could matter more to. The money I have isn't half enough to let me build my engine, and I can't expect any such bone-head as Tredeker to take it up and build it from the drawings. And to think that I could make the Crescent the best car in the world if there was a bit of sense in the management here! What's five hundred dollars toward the work? If I could only build a car and run it in the Cosmopolitan! There's twenty thousand dollars for the winning, and I've got to work on an automatic punch for seventeen cents an hour."

Marcella reflected that if he had five hundred dollars, while not eligible for a suitor, he might be useful for occasional more or less expensive entertainments.

"It's a shame!" she exclaimed. "I just know you can build a perfectly elegant engine, Mr. MacDonald, and if Mr. Tredeker only knew about it, he'd look it over. He's just mad to win the race and Walker

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has a standing offer of ten thousand dollars if he builds a winning car. Mr. Verrens is helping him—so I know all about it. But that's the way it goes. You have to meet with all kinds of disappointments and have no appreciation in this world. I hope I see you often, Mr. MacDonald, and I want you to tell me all about your plans and maybe I can speak a word for you some time. You know I'd love to do it."

They had paused before the big glass front of the garage where Henry had first set eyes on Marcella. He looked at it in some surprise.

"This is my father's place," said Marcella with careless inflection. "I got to bid you good-by, now. But *do* let me hear all about it some time."

Henry was overcome and blind. He hardly knew how it happened that her interest stirred his courage so. But he found himself stammering a request that she go to a show and take dinner with him somewhere some night and realized that she had accepted with a gracious air and a slight blush. The last must have been a product of his imagination, however, for no genuine blush could have penetrated Marcella's complexion.

At any rate he turned away after she had entered the door of the garage and felt at peace and happy. He had a friend, at last, to whom he could tell his troubles and show his secret. He was sure that his sore heart would be poulticed by her sympathy and that her limpid eyes would look their tender commiseration into his own.

He nearly walked into a large car that was being driven past and had to leap quickly and awkwardly out of its way. The chauffeur had thrown on his emergency brake and brought it to a stop, with a muttered remark or two, and the flustered Henry looked up to see it just beyond him, while a young woman in a tailored suit leaned from the seat and asked him anxiously if he had been hurt.

Her voice was so soft and her skin so clearly natural that Henry was not in the least embarrassed. He hastened to assure her that he was not at all injured and that it was all his own fault, and felt soothed for some reason at the smile she nodded at him as she drove away. Then he suddenly remembered Marcella's voice and smile and complexion—and he felt a distinct shock. Only a strong sense of unreasoning loyalty caused him sternly to force back into his consciousness a surging suspicion and disgust.

But by the time he had finished his meager supper and recalled Carr's half-grudging invitation, the impression created by the girl in the big car had vanished and he was again steeped in sentiment for Marcella. His governing obsession was for his invention and his career, however, and though his hermit-like existence rendered him peculiarly susceptible to feminine influence, he retained in full force the determination to vindicate his genius. No blonde sympathy could cause him to neglect that for long.

Consequently he took his way to his room, dug out of his suitcase a roll of blueprints and with that in one hand and a heavy, rather long wooden box in the other, sought a car that set him down within a short time near the apartment-house in which Carr maintained rooms.

THE superintendent welcomed him more cordially than he had hoped and set out cigars and a drink which Henry refused. But Carr seemed a little reluctant to enter into discussion of his status with the Crescent Company, and only his stubborn insistence on introducing the subject finally won him a hearing.

"It isn't that I kick on working and showing what there is in me," he began, when Carr had finally yielded to the point of listening to his complaints. "But would *you* like to see the work of years and the qualifications acquired by long application subordinated to routine, 'show me,' baby tricks fit only for green students fresh from school? You know you wouldn't stand for it and I can't afford to do so either. I'm no inexperienced youth.

"I worked for years before ever I went to college and you've seen that the mere craft of the mechanic is no mystery to me. I had to be a mechanic and a good one to construct the parts I had to have. When I went to college it was to add to mechanical skill the technical knowledge which would aid me to solve my problems.

"There was four years of study, all directed to an end, and then, not satisfied with that, I went abroad; and maybe you can guess what that meant to me who didn't have any too much of this world's goods. But I got a place with Dampièrre, and *he*

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didn't put me through any apprenticeship of tooling trucks and running a drill. He asked me to show him that I knew what I claimed—and I did. For two years I worked there, perfecting my mechanical skill and learning a good many things about motor design that aren't known on this side as yet. All the time I was working and learning for one end.

"Maybe you can understand it when I tell you that I wouldn't even consider presenting my ideas to the foreign manufacturers, although I knew how Cavalier and the rotary-valve engine had been received over here. I argued that our manufacturers had learned their lesson by that experience and that they'd be ready to listen to new ideas after that. And the Crescent was my ideal. In spite of backward design, it had a reputation to be proud of and had made American cars recognized even in Europe. I looked forward to the day when I could come to this place and give my invention to Tredeker and see the Crescent take precedence of all cars, foreign and domestic.

"But I came here and took post-graduate work first, so that there should be no mistake made. I had made money in France and most of that went to research. I also had access to shops in which I could build a working model. But when it was all over I had little enough left, certainly not enough by a good deal to pay for the building of a life-sized engine which would prove my contention. I had the model, of course, and that would run all right, but you can't expect a miniature to be refined to the point where it will show the power proportionate in a full-sized model. And then came the inquiry from the Crescent people for a designer, as I thought. It seemed to be my chance and I leaped at it when the offer was made.

"And now, I don't care about salary, so long as it's a living wage, but what I do want is recognition for a long training and achievement. If they wanted a designer, as I understood, why do I have to load castings on a truck at seventeen cents an hour?"

"You've had no practical experience," protested Carr after a pause.

"If you mean that I've never worked in a factory with the sole idea of designing cars for that particular concern, it is true. I've done special work always. But I've worked on problems harder than any you have in a shop like this and made improvements more important than any you require. I've never built a single car, but there isn't a thing in the chassis of one that I can't build."

"We don't know that," said Carr, "and we can't afford to let you spoil material on your mere word."

"I can prove it!" cried Henry. "But what is proof to Tredeker? He thought Dampierre's was a sort of drug-store!"

"Did he?" asked Carr, and laughed shortly. "I can believe it."

He was silent again, eying Henry reflectively before he made up his mind to be frank. Finally he leaned back in his chair.

"D'you know Tredeker's history?" he asked.

Henry shook his head.

"'Child of Luck', they should have called him," went on Carr. "Ten years ago he was salesman for a leather-goods house, and a pretty good one as salesmen go. He had saved about five thousand dollars and he made about five thousand a year. But he was a gambler by nature, though he didn't play the wheel or the ponies like Jim Parker."

"Who's Parker?" asked Henry, thinking of Marcella.

"Parker's a garage man and all 'round sport down the street a piece. You've probably seen his place, as it's the biggest one in town. His daughter works in the office: tall, fancy-looking blonde with a haughty crust that would choke a dog and a make-up that would shock a chorus girl. Parker would bet a hatful on a pinocle game, so he's always either rich as dogs or stony broke. But that isn't the kind of gambler Frank Tredeker was. He was the speculating kind, and just in a fever to bet on some get-rich-quick scheme—the kind that buys oil stock in a field next to the Standard holdings.

"There was an old Swede blacksmith or other mechanic that had a little shop near Tredeker's office, and this bird had an invention. It was a contraption in the way of a low-tension magneto when nobody dreamed of using anything but the high tension. Every time the old fellow mentioned it to any one they reported him to the lunacy commission. They nearly laughed him into his grave.

"Somehow or other he managed to get

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hold of Tredeker's ear and told him his tale of woe. Tredeker took a chance with his five thousand and they started making the thing in a little two-by-four shack. What's the use of telling it. The Swede was Sorenson, and now he rides in limousines and drinks champagne out of buckets. So could Tredeker if he wanted to.

"Frank bought the controlling interest in the Crescent on a bet. He wanted to win the Cosmopolitan with his own car and it had to be a native one. Tredeker don't know anything about making cars and doesn't want to. He leaves that to Walker and Verrens, with me to run the shops. But they can have all the money they want to design motors if they only will build one, eventually, that will carry off the race.

"So far they haven't done it. They've built a good road-car for years, but when it comes to the track they always fall down. *I* say its weight and balance, but they won't listen to me and go on building heavier engines all the time until they've got a stock-car so over-engined that it's almost dangerous to drive. So there you have it. Frank Tredeker poses as a great manufacturer and builds the Crescent just to turn out a car that will win the Cosmopolitan, but as a matter of fact he don't know enough about the business to talk intelligently of it.

"He's a sport and a good one as sports go. But the thing a sport swears by first and last is gameness—and that in his opinion you haven't shown. Again, since his experience with Sorenson, he has a fanatical admiration for the practical man and contempt for the technical. Verrens is game and rule-of-thumb, and he can have anything in the shop. Walker is one of the early, self-taught automobile engineers and once was a good one, but he never had the foundation to advance with the profession and is building motors today that aren't really any better than those he designed half a dozen years ago. He's looking for technical help right now and that's why he got you, but he had a notion that you'd be a raw kid that he could pump for ideas and fool into the notion that he himself originated them. He's no more use for you and thinks he's drawn a lemon. You'll stand no show of getting advanced by him, I think."

"But if Tredeker wants a motor," cried Henry, "why can't he try mine?"

Carr smiled pityingly.

"There doesn't pass a week that some crank or other doesn't call with a world-changing motor to show Tredeker," he explained. "And Frank wouldn't know the fly-wheel of it from the crank-case. He shows 'em to Walker and Walker turns 'em down. If any one says 'motor' to Tredeker, nowadays, the old man has a fit."

"He couldn't turn mine down," said Henry with supreme confidence. "I've got it! Got the genuine thing! Got the real, valveless engine that'll show forty per cent. more power per unit of weight than any other known. Here! Look at this!"

Heedless of Carr's stare of pity and incredulity, he dragged his wooden box from between his feet and threw it open. There, nestling in cotton waste and packed as if it were a jewel, was something that even Carr must admire. It was an engine in miniature, an internal-combustion engine of the same general shape and form as others, but tiny and delicate beyond description. It must have been made by an artist and some of its parts be more microscopic than those of a watch. If Henry had actually built this thing himself, then Carr admitted he was truly a mechanic of supreme ability.

But Henry had lifted it from its nest of waste and set it on the table. A disconnected part or two he screwed into place. A tiny receptacle was filled from a bottle of gasoline that he produced, the little crank whirled over and the dainty fly-wheel began to rotate like a wheel of light. But there was no vibration or noise. It simply spun silently and with inconceivable swiftness.

"Look at it!" cried Henry. "Just look at it! Isn't it a beauty?"

It was—and Carr admitted it. He bent over it and looked it over with a critical eye. Parts were missing or enclosed so that he could not see them.

"Where are the valves?" he asked.

"Not a valve on it," said Henry impressively. "Neither poppet, sleeve nor rotary. Intake and exhaust there has to be, but see if you can tell me how?"

"The valveless engine!" muttered Carr. "Man, there isn't any such thing! It's a dream—an impossibility like perpetual motion!"

"But there it is!" sang Henry, his face lit up with the fire of achievement.

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"It can't be done!" muttered Carr, and bent to find the trick.

Henry stopped the motor and handed him tools to use in thorough examination.

V

AS MR. TREDEKER expressed himself as frankly bored by details of machinery and techincal terms, Carr was deputed to exhibit the great invention to the jury, which was made up of Messrs. Walker and Verrens. Tredeker went out with only a casual glance at the beautiful model as it stood on the table, but he said he would be back later and hear the verdict. Meantime Henry toiled half-heartedly in the shops and tried hard not to hope that his day of vindication was at hand, lest he be disappointed.

Tredeker came back in due time and found that the three men had obeyed instructions left with them to await his return in his office. The model was boxed and resting by Mr. Carr's hand. This was also according to instructions, for Tredeker, whatever his faults, was a square man and also not entirely convinced of the equal rectitude of others.

"You have charge of that thing, Carr," he had said. "If this fellow can trust you with it, it's all right with me, but I want you to see that it don't go out of your possession. Let Walker and Verrens have a look, but don't give them a chance to walk off with it, for to be frank I wouldn't put it past them."

This having been said in the full hearing of the two men, they tried to appear injured and indignant, but the effort was not impressive. Perhaps it was Tredeker's slur that added to their prejudice against Henry, but at any rate they began the examination and continued it with every indication of contempt and disbelief. Thus Tredeker found them sitting when he entered.

"Well, what's the verdict?" he demanded cheerfully. "Can you win the Cosmopolitan with that thing?"

"If you're asking me," retorted Verrens, "you couldn't win a pushmobile race with the thing. It's punk, that's what!"

"Utterly impracticable!" added Walker decisively. "It's a nice looking bit of fancy work, but it won't do. To begin with——"

He went on to expound its defects in technical terms, but Tredeker waved him to silence.

"That's enough!" he exclaimed. "I'm hiring you two to know what's good and what's not, and I'm not studying trigonometry just to listen understandingly to you. If it's no good, well and good. That settles it! But if it *is*, you two know what will happen to you if I find it out. No use, Carr! I can't waste time and money on the thing. If the fellow is the crack you say he is, put him on any job you want. If he's the baby Walker and Verrens say he is, fire him and be done with it. Take his toy locomotive back to him and tell him we're full-up with models right now and can't buy any more."

Carr endeavored to gain a further hearing, but Tredeker would not listen. He depended on Walker and Verrens, and the superintendent could not move him.

"It's not fair to the man!" Carr cried, after Walker and the tester had left the office. "You're a square man, Mr. Tredeker, and you ought to give MacDonald a hearing. They've been misrepresenting him to you."

This gave Tredeker a little food for thought and he nodded in a manner that stirred a faint hope in Carr.

"Perhaps that's so," he said. "I've been judging him by report from others, it's a fact. Well, I'll have a look at this fellow myself, but I warn you, Carr, that if he don't measure up standard, he can build pretty little toy engines till Hades freezes, but he'll do it somewhere else, for I'll bounce him so quick it will burn his feet a-going."

IN THE meantime Walker and Verrens went out together, and when they had reached a secluded spot they looked at each other uncomfortably.

"D'ye think there's anything in it?" asked Verrens.

"There might be a little," answered Walker casually. "One or two of his ideas are good, though a little crude. Takes a practical man to make them work, though."

"Think it would help get the race?"

"Well, I'd like to try it out a little. Can't say whether there's anything in it from that model. If we had the detailed drawings now."

"We could build one and test it—and probably Tredeker wouldn't know the difference."

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"He might recognize one built on the model, but we could change the looks of it so he'd never spot it—if we had the plans."

"I'd like to get hold of his drawings," reflected Verrens.

"I don't see why you couldn't," replied Walker thoughtfully.

"Nix on the burglary," said Verrens.

Walker did not heed this disclaimer.

"The principle's a little difficult, and I didn't altogether grasp it," he mused. "I guess we'd have to have the drawings. And I've noticed him walking home with that Parker girl a lot this last week. I thought you and she were kind of thick, Verrens?"

"Believe me," said Verrens, "I'm high man with that chicken even if this sport does slant around with her when I'm not around. When I make the motion, she plays dead, see!"

"Then," said Walker, "you ought to be able to talk her into getting hold of those drawings. He's easy. One of those sentimental, soft kids that'd write poetry if he only knew how. Go to it, Verrens!"

Meantime Carr went back to where Henry waited and broke the news to him as gently and sympathetically as possible. It had taken a week of explaining and demonstrating to him before he had yielded full belief in the engine, but, once given, his faith was as stubborn as his disbelief had been, and he had become an almost violent partisan of the valveless motor. It hurt him nearly as badly as it did the inventor to have it dismissed and discredited so cavalierly and without a fair trial, but he harbored a slight hope yet, as he explained to Henry.

It was true that Tredeker was utterly incapable of understanding the subtle points of mechanics and depended absolutely on Walker, or rather on the latter's self-interest; but if Henry could make a personal appeal, founded on a hardly won approval by his conduct, Tredeker was just the man to take a chance and back him in building a demonstrator. And Tredeker had promised to look Henry over and decide whether he was worth gambling on.

This cheered up Henry also. He had no idea what test he was to meet in order to win the approval of the Great Man, but he determined that he would create a good impression if it lay in him to do so. Therefore he told Marcella when walking home with her that he had hopes at last of gaining a hearing, and warmed himself fatuously in the artificial heat of her sympathy and joy for him. He invited her to attend another show in the expansion of the moment.

IT WAS late in the afternoon of the next day when a boy appeared in the shops and gave Henry a message from Mr. Tredeker, asking him to appear at the latter's office when his day's work was done and he was dressed in his street clothes, as the president would like to see him on a matter of personal interest. Again Henry was wildly hopeful, in spite of his efforts to discount all chances of failure. He worked in a dream the rest of the afternoon, and watched the time as if his agitation could hurry the passing minutes.

At last the whistle blew and he could dress, which he did with more care than usual, trying to remove the signs of toil. Then he went out of the shops and into the office section, suddenly conscious that his knees felt weak and that his mouth was very dry.

When he came to the Great Man's room he could hardly drag his feet across the threshold, and the sight of Tredeker's broad back gave him the ague. The sight of a girl who faced the president shocked him into momentary life, however, and he was warm and nervous instead of cold and dully inert when he recognized the young lady who had so nearly run him down the week before. He did not stop to ask himself what she was doing in this office, nor to reflect on her presence in any way. In his embarrassment at intruding prematurely he thought only of escape, and was hurriedly backing out when Tredeker, attracted by the girl's gaze at Henry, turned about and saw him.

"Come in, MacDonald," he said. "I've been expecting you. This is my daughter. Alice, this is Mr. MacDonald, one of our young men. 'Scuse me a moment while I go out and tell Sturgis I won't need him. I'll drive you home myself, Alice."

He went out and Henry, fidgeting on one foot and then on the other, felt that he was making a fool of himself. He was acutely conscious of several facts, the chief one being that, though in all that is commonly considered as forming beauty this daughter of the Great Man could not equal Marcella Parker, yet her whole being and presence

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were immeasurably superior to the person of that young lady.

Henry felt that same qualm of dissillusion for the other girl that he had experienced once before in the presence of this young woman. He felt shame at himself for admiring the other. He did not express the thought nor consciously form it, but the conviction took root in his mind that Marcella compared with Miss Tredeker much as a skilfully executed artificial rose might compare with a freshly plucked violet. There was nothing artificial about Miss Tredeker, or if there were it resembled nature too closely for his senses to grasp the deceit.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. MacDonald?" said Miss Tredeker pleasantly.

Her voice had the peculiar effect of dissipating much of Henry's embarrassment, and he sat down with less awkwardness than he usually displayed. She looked at him with shy interest. He was unconscious of the fact, but he had a face that was keen and bright to an amazing degree and eyes that were reflections of the brilliancy of mind that lay behind them. They were expressive and soft, flashing and mobile, keen and candid.

To a woman given to noting the quality of a man's appearance he was most fascinating. And he was so plainly not aware of his own attraction that Miss Tredeker felt she could have told him that he was comely without even knowing him well.

"Are you the man who has the new engine?" she asked him in order to relieve his embarrassment.

He brightened at her knowledge, not knowing that this was the extent of it, except that her father had also mentioned that it was a failure and a fraud. He said that he was, but she cared nothing for that fact and only watched the changing light in his eyes. They were almost like those of a dog who is unexpectedly petted, and that roused her ready pity for him.

She would have tried to draw him out if her father had not returned. He was apparently in a hurry and not inclined to give his daughter more time to get acquainted with his shop hand.

"Let's go!" he said. "Come on, MacDonald. I want you to go part of the way with me and out to the Speedway. Alice, you come along and when we've finished with MacDonald, I'll drive you home in time to doll up for dinner."

Wondering what was on foot, Henry followed the girl out and stood beside a big, low, rakish touring-car of evident power, to help her into the seat of the tonneau. Then, obeying Tredeker's command, he clambered to the front seat beside his employer. Without loss of time Tredeker threw in his clutch, slid from low to intermediate and high and rolled off down the street.

"This," said Tredeker bluffly, "is some car! I had it made especially for me in the Crescent shops and it has a duplicate of the engine that we entered in the race last year. I can tear off seventy-five and eighty miles an hour on the road with it, when the top is down."

"But I hope you won't try it while I'm in it, father," said his daughter.

Tredeker only laughed.

"She eats speed; she likes it," he explained to Henry. "Good, game little girl, she is, as she should be. It's speed that makes motoring what it is, after all. I wouldn't give a hang for a car if I had to crawl along at twenty miles an hour all the time. What I like is to get out and burn up a road. Give me sixty miles an hour or I'm not enjoying myself. And the fellow that don't like to hit her up can't stay with me, let me tell you."

Possibly the remark was only general and had no reference to Henry and his job, but the young man remembered his humiliating experience with Verrens and felt a sudden hope that speed would not be required of him and a sick fear lest the whirr of the engine should tell him that the road was flowing more rapidly beneath the wheels.

But they only ran along at the legal limit for a mile or two, until the paved street changed to a dirt one and the houses began to thin out. Finally they passed a cornfield and turned through an obtuse angle into a country road that ran straight away as far as one could see.

"She's a bird of a car," said Tredeker. "Let's let her out a little and I'll show you what she can do, Mr. MacDonald."

Henry sank into his seat with a desperate desire to clutch the sides of it. He wished to tell Mr. Tredeker that he could not stand speed, but he knew that his fate depended on the impression he made and it was apparent that his employer would be displeased if

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he should object to rapid motion. So he said nothing and gritted his teeth.

THE powerful engine began to purr with a more insistent note as the throttle was opened and the power flowed into the cylinders. Faster and faster she fled until the road flowed like a white ribbon of mist beneath the hood. The fences and telephone poles began to melt into murky zigzag streaks. The whole machine seemed to stretch and lengthen with the push of its motor and to bend lower to the road, as a fleeing animal might have done.

A chill had run up Henry's spine as the speed increased. A lump interfered with his breathing, settling at the same time in his throat and on his diaphragm. His lungs seemed compressed and his hair full of electricity. His scalp crawled under his cap. Before his eyes, which he could not tear from the road, a great, misty chaos began to form and curl forward like a wave to fall upon him. His head started to swim and his eyes to blur. The fear of the thing, the stark, maddening terror of speed, crept up and seized his heart-strings, clutching them until he wished and tried to scream aloud.

He was a pitiful sight to one who could have seen and understood. But Tredeker only glanced at him and smiled grimly and contemptously at his staring eyes and distorted features. The girl behind him could only see his back, crouched rigidly in the seat, and necessarily understood little of the ordeal he was undergoing.

The road that had seemed endless came to an end of its straightness and the car went giddily round a turn. As it swerved and skidded slightly, Henry gave a hoarse cry and crumpled up in the seat. Tredeker looked at him and then throttled down. The brakes went on and the car slowed up.

"He hasn't got much sand," said the Great Man, as he pulled the limp form of Henry upright. "Any man that's as big a baby as that is no good. *He* design an engine that'd win the Cosmopolitan! He don't even know what speed is!"

His daughter, herself somewhat agitated by the terrific gait they had been maintaining, leaned forward as she sensed something wrong.

"Why, the poor fellow has fainted!" she cried indignantly. "Father, why didn't you drive slower? You might have seen that he couldn't stand it."

"I wanted to see for myself if the story I'd heard was true," said Tredeker. "I'm sorry for him, but I didn't know it was as bad as all that. Anyway, it's a cinch he won't do, and Verrens was right. He can hunt another job."

His daughter, not heeding the meaning of this at the time, was busy in ministering to Henry. She had lifted his head to the back of the seat and slipped her arm under it. Now she bade her father find water, and he, not at all a hard-hearted man, and sorry enough for Henry, went to fetch some.

"But he won't do," he repeated to himself. "He hasn't sand enough to know anything."

VI

THE first man to feel the far-reaching effect of Henry's testing was Mr. Carr. As Henry was directly under the superintendent the latter was summoned to Mr. Tredeker's office and bluntly ordered to give that young man his time. When he protested, Mr. Tredeker expressed a free opinion of Henry and reiterated his declaration that he wanted no dead timber of that kind in his employ.

Mr. Carr spoke feelingly and with heat against a judgment founded on such grounds, and Tredeker answered with equal or superior asperity. It ended with Carr resigning his own job in a spasm of indignation. Probably Henry's treatment would not have induced this action had it not been for the fact that Carr had long chafed under the direction of Walker and had only recently received advantageous offers from a concern located in the East.

The second man affected was Henry himself. Carr having resigned and flatly refused to carry the order to Henry, Tredeker undertook the task himself. He had Henry sent to his office.

Henry appeared with set face, for he had by this time no illusions left as to his status in this factory.

"Young man," said Tredeker forcibly, as Henry stood sullenly before him, "I don't have to tell you, if you've got horse sense, that you won't do in this place. We want men here—and not hysterics. It may not take gameness to draw designs, but it takes it to get out and find how the design works after its done. You ain't got it, as you'll

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have to admit, and we can't waste any more time on you. Personally, I've nothing against you. I hope you land where you can do better, but you're deadwood here and you might as well quit. Call at the office and get your pay to the end of the week."

As once before, in Henry the conviction of shame began to melt under a sullen and growing anger and sense of unfair treatment. His lips drew to a line as he faced Tredeker.

"Maybe you think you're giving me a fair deal, Mr. Tredeker," he said hoarsely. "I don't! I know its no use to ask you to change your mind, but I'm going to make a prediction to you and it is this: Some day soon you'll be sorry you didn't give me the chance I asked for."

"As how?" smiled Tredeker, a little amused at the threat which he ascribed, naturally enough, to the conceit of a visionary student.

"You want to win the Cosmopolitan," said Henry, "and want it bad—if rumor speaks the truth. Now I know that the Bouchier and the De Chaud people are both going to enter teams in the next race, and maybe others will do so. You've no chance against the French with your old-style motors—but you would have with mine. However, that's not so much the question. What I want to tell you is that, if not this year, then next or the year after that—some time *I* am going to beat your car in the Cosmopolitan—I, myself!"

Henry's eye was flashing and his face determined, but the recollection of his performance of yesterday nullified any effect his ringing words might have had. Instead of being impressed, Tredeker merely leaned back and laughed good naturedly.

"Go to it!" he said. "I can't say you frighten me to death either with your French cars or with your prediction. But I'll make you a sporting proposition, young fellow. You beat my car in the Cosmopolitan with a motor of your own design and build, and with yourself behind it, and the day you do it I'll fire Walker and give you his job."

Henry glowered sullenly at him, but Tredeker met his wrath with imperturbable and smiling banter. As the baffled young man turned sullenly away he repeated his challenge.

"And it's a go, too!" crowed Tredeker. "I'm no welsher, MacDonald, and any time you make good on those specifications I'll come up to my part of the bargain. Now sail in and show us all what you can do."

He chuckled as he turned back to his desk, and Henry went down to the office with a heart rendered more sore by the knowledge that he was the butt for Tredeker's guying.

Carr had left abruptly to take another position and Henry was now without any job at all. The third and fourth parties who were affected by the affair were Walker and Verrens, who in the nature of things were to be classed together.

Verrens at first was solely pleased with the conditions. He had begun to hate Henry deeply because Marcella appeared to favor him to some extent. This would get rid of him, he argued. But Walker, who was more tortuous and acute, reasoned differently. When Verrens took occasion to express his satisfaction, Walker met it gloomily.

"Nice mess it is!" he said sourly. "Now how are we going to get that engine if this bird flies away from here?"

"Shucks!" snapped Verrens. "We don't need his engine. What's the matter with the ones you design?"

"Nothing," said Walker. "They're all right—if I do say it myself. But there's a trick or two in that model that is pretty good. I had the same idea in a little different form myself. But it would take me a long time to work it out and I'm afraid I couldn't get it figured down and tested in time for the race. Now this fellow has hit on about the same proposition for saving weight and getting more power and, while his scheme isn't a bit better than mine, it's further developed—so I'd like to get hold of it. Tredeker is getting impatient with us, Verrens, for not having turned out a winner yet, and I wouldn't be surprised if he'd really get sore at us if we don't put it across this year."

Verrens looked at Walker and Walker looked away. But there was little left to imagination in their relations. Verrens well understood what the other was driving at. The talk of similar ideas did not fool the tester.

"I reckon its a risky proposition," said the man. "We might get the plans—but he could prove it on us all right."

"We should worry!" snorted Walker.

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"If you can fix it with the Parker girl to get the tracings, we can strike off a set of blueprints and work from those. She can slip the tracings back to him and he'd never know the difference, in all probability.

"When you're building a racing-engine you don't let every one see what you've got nor let every Tom, Dick and Harry give your car the once-over when it's on the track. He'd have no way of telling what kind of engine he had in it until Tredeker commenced to build them and sell them. By that time we'd have our money and Tredeker would have to stand the suit for infringement. At that, he might win it, because I don't think this bird has sense to see that his motor is patented.

"But the main thing to look out for just now is that he don't go wandering off until we get his dope from him."

"Tredeker has spilled the beans for us there," said Verrens. "You couldn't talk the old man into letting him stay if you used a phonograph with an indestructible record. He's batty on gameness and you know I'd not be high man in the test department if I couldn't spin a car faster than any one he ever saw. This fellow gets his goat—and that's a fact!"

"He needn't stay here," said Walker. "I've been thinking about that ever since I heard he was fired. You've got to get after that girl of Parker's and her old man. There's where you can fix it."

"How?" demanded Verrens.

"Go and tell Parker that the fellow is a boss mechanic and can build cars from scrap-iron. Give him a strong boost as a workman and tell him all he lacks is gameness—and, at that, I've got to admit that you'll not be lying. Then get the girl to jolly him up and work on his sentiments. He's easy there. If he thinks she's pining away at the idea of his leaving her, he'll be willing enough to stay and work for her old man. If he gets a notion that he may come into a nice business as a son-in-law, it won't really hurt your chances. Parker won't let go of that meal ticket of his to any chance passer-by."

Verrens demurred for some time, for it roused his jealousy to think of Henry being jollied by his own lady love, but Walker had arguments of force to apply and gradually overcame his reluctance. In the end Verrens agreed to set the trap for the unsophisticated inventor.

THE first person Verrens approached was Marcella. Possibly, even probably, he had never philosophized on feminine nature, but of a certain variety of it he had a great deal of practical knowledge. Accordingly he wasted little finesse on Marcella. He sought her out at a convenient moment.

"Kid," he said, "you and me could fix it up in a minute if you only wanted to."

"Fix what up?" asked Marcella consciously.

"To get married," replied Verrens. "I'm going to get in big next Spring and there wont be any use our wasting any more time if I connect. I'm going to win the Cosmopolitan, all right."

"Tell it to Sweeney!" replied Marcella. "I been hearin' that dream so long I got the earache."

"It's a go this time," insisted Verrens. "Walker and me has it all fixed. You know Tredeker promises the prize money to the driver and Walker gets his rake-off for his design. Well, we got the design that'll win with any kind of a drive and you know *me!* But this fellow MacDonald has a scheme that'll fit in with our design better than the one we have and we want to make this thing dead sure. If we could get a look at the plans of that engine of his we'd have a cinch of it."

"I'm dead on to you, Walt!" nodded Marcella. "But honest to goodness, is that dope he gives me straight goods about his machine? It ain't the wonder he says it is—is it?"

"I guess it's some engine," admitted Verrens. "It didn't look like much to me, but Walker is all up in the air about it and he'd commit murder to get it."

"And you're sure you can win with it?"

"I don't know nothing about the machine," Verrens admitted. "But I can drive any car as fast as it'll stand and hold together—and if Walker is so set on this it's because he's dead sure it beats anything he can get up. I leave it to you if it's a good bet."

Marcella thought it over.

"I guess we can take a chance on it anyway," she said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing much just yet," said Verrens. "Just jolly the fellow along and make him think you're nutty about him. Get him all persuaded to stay here and hold your

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hand while I go after your old man and get him to offer MacDonald a job in his shop. After we make sure he ain't going to fly the coop on us, I'll fix it with you to get his dope. After that I don't care how soon your old man fires him."

"That oughtn't to be hard," observed Marcella. "He's so soft it's almost a shame to string him along."

Marcella having acted as Verrens had expected, he went to see her father. Here he would have had a more difficult task, since he could not be so frank as to the motives that actuated his recommendation, if it had not been for a fact that Verrens, nor anybody but Parker himself, was aware of. What this was remains to be seen, but it manifested its influence in the manner in which Parker interested himself in Verrens' tale of a wonderful mechanic who had lost his job because he was not courageous enough to please his employer. Verrens was sorry for this fellow and wanted to see that he got a job, and he thought that Parker might have occasion to use such a man.

"What's the matter with his sand?" asked Parker.

Verrens told him that Henry was given to fright when driving at abnormal speeds, a fact in which Parker seemed to find further food for thought.

"Could this fellow build a car?" he asked. "Just a sort of experimental car out of any old material—so I could have it to show if I wanted to interset some capital in building one?"

"You going to go into the manufacturing game?" demanded Verrens.

"Well, maybe I'll think about it," said Parker cautiously. "If I do, I might want a fellow that could put together some junk that'd look like a real car."

"This is the very man you want," said Verrens emphatically. "He could take a lot of scrap-iron and build a car that'd look like a Vanderbilt Cup winner. He's *good*, I tell you!"

"Well, send him around and I'll talk to him," said Parker, as if the whole matter were a trivial one in his eyes. "Maybe I can use him and maybe I can't."

Soon after Henry had left the Crescent factory, downcast and heart-sore, and when he was about ready to shake the dust of this cruel city from his feet he encountered Marcella, not knowing that she had been practically lying in wait for him for two or three days. She gave him no chance to merely lift his hat and turn away as was his first intention, but rushed up to him and held out her hand, almost held out both hands in fact.

"Mr. Mac*Donald!*" she breathed rather too soulfully, had Henry been suspicious. "I'm so glad to see you! I was afraid you'd gone and left the city without ever coming to see me."

Henry was embarrassed and yet warmed by her evident concern for him.

"I had been thinking of going," he admitted.

"Without seeing me? How *could* you do it? Oh, I think it's a shame you should have been treated this way! I just wish I could tell that Mr. Tredeker what I think of him and I bet he'd have red ears for a while. Walt Verrens told me about it and he thought it was a bleeding shame. He admires you a lot, though I know you don't care for Walt—but he's really a nice fellow and he's got a good deal of faith in you. If I was you I'd stay right here and get even with that Tredeker. I wouldn't let him put anything like that over on me."

"How?" asked Henry ironically and glumly.

"I don't know," said Marcella spiritedly. "But a man like you could do it. I'd get a job here and work up—or do something. I'd get some one to help build my engine and show him. It's a shame you intend to leave. I—I don't like to think of it."

It was artistically enough done to deceive a more astute male than Henry. There was just the right note of sentiment and regret, just the slightest catch in her voice that told him plainly that she was suppressing her real sorrow at his departure. His heart swelled and went right out to her in her grief.

"Wo—would you really care if I went?" he gulped.

She looked at him with ineffable shyness and embarrassment, stealing the halting glance from beneath the brim of her too wide hat.

"You know I would," she whispered.

Henry could not find words to express his appreciation of her interest. He walked with her for several steps without a word. He was thinking that her sympathy and interest were sweet beyond all description but also feeling some subtle discomfort at the

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unexpectedness of it. Somehow or other, when his heart's tenderest loyalty should have been flowing out to Marcella's image that image was obscured by one of a girl's fresh, unimproved face that bent over his own from above, while it's owner bathed his face with a tiny *mouchoir* dipped in water. Impatiently he dismissed this memory and turned back to where his real duty lay.

"Then," said he with firmness, "I shan't leave town. But I don't know where I'm to get a job with the black eye this will give me."

"Oh!" said Marcella, trying to appear properly joyful. "That oughtn't to be hard. Lots of people would be glad to hire you. I bet pa would give you a job in the shops. I heard him say he wished he could get some one that knew how to build a car, just the other day. Why don't you go and ask him?"

"I wouldn't like to presume on your interest with him," said Henry stiffly, the idea of being indebted to this girl being, for some reason he did not analyze, rather distasteful to him.

Marcella was clever enough to handle him, however.

"Don't tell him you know me!" she said. "He wouldn't give you the job if he knew that. He never did like any of my suitors. But you go and show him what you can do and I'll bet you get the job. I've got faith in you, Mr. MacDonald."

And as Henry certainly did not lack faith in himself, he felt that she was even cleverer than first impressions had indicated, and privately determined to go and show her father that at least one of her admirers was all man.

VII

HENRY sought an early opportunity of applying to Parker for a position. He was under no illusions as to the sort of job he would be offered and only hoped that it would pay enough to enable him to live and save enough to in time carry out his deep-seated intention of seeking revenge and vindication. He might be impractical, but he was stubborn, and if he had to work at menial tasks for years he would do so in order to retaliate on Tredeker. Walker and Verrens he merely despised, in which he showed discrimination.

He found Parker to be quite a different man from the individual he had pictured to himself. The garage proprietor was a tall, hatchet-faced man who dressed in black and looked something like a minister, except that his face had more hardness than was strictly clerical. But it was a gloomy countenance and seemed to conceal a perpetual pondering behind its masking effect.

Parker had little to say and always appeared to be intently scrutinizing the person who was engaging his attention. When Henry obtained his interview and set out his business, Parker looked him over sadly and keenly and gave the impression that some deep thought entirely unconnected with the subject at issue was engrossing him.

"It's this way," he explained. "It's true enough that I can use a man, but I ain't so rich that I can throw away money. And things ain't been going so well lately as they might have gone. Still, I've an idea that I may want to experiment with building a car some day—and I want a man I can depend on to put it together. But I can't spend much money on gettin' it up and buyin' machinery, so it will have to be an assembled car if I try it at all.

"I've got an idea—but I reckon it'll have to wait for a little while till things look up a bit. Still, if you're all that Verrens says, I can give you a job in the shops at sixty cents an hour. You can work eight hours or you can work ten, just as you choose. Only, if I ask you to work at a special sort of job, you're supposed to do it—see!"

"Certainly," said Henry confidently and gratefully. "I'll work at any job you say, and if it is building a car out of assembled parts or tacking it together out of scrap I'll turn the trick. Only, can I use the shops when nothing else is doing to work on a little thing of my own out of hours?"

"If the lathe and stuff ain't needed for anything else, I don't see no objection," said Parker gloomily. "Can you drive a car?"

Henry blushed but faced the danger manfully.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I was apparently fired from my last job because, for some reason or other, driving fast gets me in a panic. I'm a coward when it somes to driving—that's a fact."

"Oh, well," said Parker tolerantly, "you

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don't have to have any sand to run a lathe, and I reckon we can do without it. But you ought to get over them feelings, young fellow."

"I hope I can," said Henry.

So Henry went to work in the big garage and repair shop of the Capital Auto and Supply Company, which was Parker's anchor to windward whenever any of his many and intricate schemes to outwit the Goddess of Fortune recoiled on his head. But his new mechanic was not aware of his employer's habits nor was his simple honesty capable of guessing the labyrinthine convolutions of Parker's gray matter.

WHILE Henry gave faithful and assiduous attention to the labor that was his lot and repaired broken axles, turned worn cylinders, wired electric installations, all in such a skilful manner that the business of the garage began to grow with public appreciation, his new master turned the germ of an idea in his mind until it showed a sprout and fecundity of growth.

From a hazy scheme of stock-jobbing, it developed into a straight gambling proposition, and from that to an increasingly subtle and stunning and Napoleonic villainy. Brick after brick was painstakingly added to the fabric of fraud through the Summer days and late into the Fall. By the time frost had come upon them the scheme was complete.

Before that, however, several things had happened to Henry. First of all, Marcella, who seemed interested in his career, had talked, whenever opportunity offered, of his great invention. And when he took her out one night to a vaudeville performance she talked about it to the exclusion almost of all other topics. Henry, however, had begun to have a growing doubt as to her interest. This was due to the fact that he soon discovered how blank her actual intelligence was. She asked things as if she had been coached, and her artificial interest soon began to pall on him. Yet she did succeed in arousing him at last.

"I wish you'd let me show the tracings to pa," she declared, after a cross examination that he almost began to resent. "I know he'd be interested and he'd love to take a chance on a thing like that if he only has the money at the time. Why don't you let me take the tracings and show them to him? It wouldn't do any harm."

Henry felt a throb of hope which he sternly dismissed at once. He knew that unless he could interest capital he must build the engine himself, and he had made up his mind that he would do so. He would no longer depend on the appreciation of upstart gamblers like Tredeker and Parker. Still it could do no harm to let Marcella have her way.

"I'll let you take a set of blue-prints," he replied. "But your father won't be interested. He wants to build a car that won't cost him anything."

"Let me try it, anyway," urged Marcella. "Only I don't want to show him blueprints. He doesn't understand them and can't follow the lines. But he'd be able to see what it looked like in the tracings."

Henry was unsuspicious in what may seem a ridiculous degree. Of course the prints should have been as good as the tracings, but some people do find difficulty in comprehending white lines against a dark background and Marcella had a way of half coaxing and half boring him into compliance with her whims that led him to do things without reflection.

The danger of the thing did not occur to him. He knew that his unpatented ideas might be stolen, but he also knew how risky such a proceeding would be and how easy for him to prove that his was the original genius that had developed the scheme. He had spent his money on delveloping the engine and had never had enough to secure a patent comprising so many claims as there would be in an application covering all that he had invented. And a patent, as he knew, is little protection to a poor man.

Thus, though he actually hoped little from the experiment, he consented, to get rid of Marcella's importunity. When he left his room the following night, he took a roll of tracing-paper from the locked drawer of his dresser and then picked up his hat. For an instant he hesitated, looking dubiously at a framed picture on the wall, and then, with a smile, shrugged his shoulders and went out. Marcella received the tracings that evening.

On the second day thereafter she brought them back to him with well-simulated regret. Her father had been interested and had remarked that they were certainly coming along with engines, and that Henry was a remarkably bright young fellow in whom he had a lot of faith, but he was

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altogether too poor to undertake anything so expensive as endeavoring to bring out a new and untried invention of that scope. Marcella almost wept when she told her chagrin at the refusal. But Henry only grinned sardonically, having expected nothing else.

After that Marcella suddenly became rather cold to Henry. She was so swamped with engagements that she could never see him and Henry, having become even more conscious of the fact that her beauty was consipcuously synthetic, was only too ready to accept the new status of affairs. Also, he was busy and cared more to spend hours in the shop than with girls.

HIS addiction to evening hours spent in grimy toil served to win Henry information he might never have gained otherwise. He was coming home late one evening, after working until almost exhausted, and trudging along a dark street gave little heed to the surroundings.

A couple standing on the corner did not arouse him until the shrill tones of a girl's voice brought him to a halt. He then looked up and saw, standing beneath an arc light while they apparently awaited a street-car, Marcella and Verrens, so engrossed in mutual recrimination that they were totally unaware that they were talking loudly enough to be heard some distance.

"How was I to know anyway?" shrilled Marcella. "You said to get the tracings and didn't I get them? You never told me how many nor nothing about what they were like, and you don't suppose I know anything about the old things anyway, do you? Here I've gone and nearly had brain fever trying to remember all the fool dope you pumped into me to ask him, and listening to his crazy algebra for hours together; and this is the way you treat me! Catch me doing anything for a guy like you again!"

Henry stopped to listen further. He found this conversation suddenly interesting.

"But listen, kid," protested Verrens. "Maybe you couldn't have done no better, but we're up against it if you don't try again. We had to have the tracings because they had to go back to him before he could get next—see! We could strike off a set of prints in an hour or two and he'd be no wiser. But here you go and bring us the set and we get the prints and turn 'em back to you before we notice that there's something missing—see! Now we got to have the rest of them tracings or we can't do a thing—see! And it's up to you to get them —see!"

"No—I don't—see!" said Marcella with spirit. "If you want them prints you can go and get them yourself—see!"

The last word was indescribably vicious in it's mimicry.

Henry waited no longer. He knew now that Marcella had played him false, but he was not too depressed at this fact to feel relief. He realized that a feeling that he should be loyal to her as his first love in a strange town had long been weighing heavily upon him. The proof that she was unworthy merely confirmed the long growing conviction that she was also unfit.

Marcella had palled on him, as he now knew, ever since that other girl had nearly run over him in her automobile. It now suddenly dawned on him without the slightest shock that she was almost coarse.

And, having fathomed the fact that Verrens, and presumably Walker, had tried to steal his invention, Henry felt a great wave of peaceful complacency creep over him. They would, would they? Well, let them try it as often as they liked and they would find him able to take care of himself.

He chuckled conceitedly over the saving impulse that had kept him from falling into the trap laid for him and ascribed it without a qualm to his own astuteness instead of to indolence.

HENRY felt inclined to grin at Marcella the next afternoon when she came into the shop to seek him after work-hours. But he was too polite.

"How are you getting along, Mr. MacDonald," she asked, "and how is the engine? It's been a perfect age since I've seen you, hasn't it? I don't see why you neglect me this way."

"Me?" said Henry. "I've not been neglecting you that I know of, Miss Parker."

"Well, I know I've missed you lots of times, but I couldn't help it, really. A girl gets so many invitations and she has to accept a few. But I wish you'd come around again, Mr. MacDonald, and I'll promise to be home the next time."

"I'm pretty busy," said Henry dubiously.

"Oh, you can spare one night. I've heard of a man that might be interested in

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that engine and I'd *so* like to hear some more about it. There were two or three things I didn't get and I couldn't explain it very well to this fellow. I'm so stupid that way, you know. Won't you come around some night and maybe we could go to a show and have one more of the good times—like we used to have."

"I'm sorry," said Henry. "I've got religion and cut out shows. I have to work every night and I've decided to build that engine myself and keep all the profits and not bother with outsiders."

Marcella slowly digested this and it made her angry.

"Of course," she said with extreme dignity, "if you don't want to come, you needn't think I'm going to urge you."

"I wouldn't," said Henry. "I'm sorry, but I don't think I'll come. It isn't safe to let those tracings go floating all over town without a guardian."

"What?" gasped Marcella.

"It isn't safe," repeated Henry with distinctness, "to let those *tracings* go floating about without supervision."

"Oh!" gasped Marcella helplessly. "I don't know what you mean."

"I'm sorry you don't," observed Henry. "I don't care to repeat it again or to make it any plainer. Let's say that a humble mechanic oughtn't to be running about with his employer's daughter and let it go at that. I'm poor but proud, Miss Parker, and I guess I'll not call again."

"Are you accusing me of anything?" demanded Marcella.

"Nothing at all," said Henry placidly, picking up a file.

"You better not!" retorted Marcella. "Anything you blame on to me you'll have to prove, kid, and don't you forget it! I got plenty of friends that'll see to that."

She flounced out with her head in the air and went at once to a telephone. Then she rang up a number and asked for Verrens.

"He's on!" she breathed into the transmitter. "He just as much as accused me of swiping them plans."

The sound of an oath came back over the phone.

"What'd you want to give it away for?"

To this Marcella answered with wrath, and there was a sultry conversation for a moment or two until she slammed the receiver into the hook and left. At the other end, Verrens sought out Walker and told him of this new development.

"No chance with her again," he wound up. "She's up in the air—and besides he's dead wise to her. Nothing doing!"

Walker gnawed his lip.

"If we don't get that sheet," he said, "we can't do a thing with it. The whole thing's on that. I can't figure to save my soul how he makes the thing scavenge, or what kind of valves he uses. If we don't get that, we'll have to build another engine like the last, and they've gone and reduced the piston displacement which will make it even less likely that it will bring home the bacon. We've to get that sheet!"

"I wish I knew how we'd do it," said Verrens gloomily.

"It's up to you," growled Walker. "You've got to get it some way. Where does he live?"

Verrens could tell him this.

"Then it's up to you to get in there and get the thing. He's got it about the place somewhere, because that sort of fellow never has sense enough to put a thing like that where it will be safe. Can't you get in and find it while he's at work? It's a boarding-house, isn't it?"

It was.

"Easy, then. Get a room there and never show up except when he's out. Don't let him see you for several days, and then slip into his room some day or night and pinch the thing. Anybody can rob a rooming-house."

"Say," said Verrens, "what do I get for this burglary, and why don't you do some of it yourself?"

"You get ten thousand or more of prize money—and I can't do it because I'm doing the designing. You wouldn't be able to build this thing without me, would you?"

"No," admitted Verrens.

"Then get wise to yourself and do what I tell you. We've *got* to turn in a winner this year, old man."

VIII

ON A day in September Henry's master entered the shop from the roomy and clean display-rooms in front and sat down gingerly on an empty carbide can, first carefully tucking the tails of his black coat out of the way. He seemed to be in a more pessimistic humor than ever as he watched his head mechanic bending

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over the lathe with a smudge of grease obscuring the pleasing character of his countenance.

In the big, dimly lighted, cement-floored storage-room, which could be seen through the open door of the shop, cars of all sorts and condition stood ranked, while several men worked about them. A group of four cars, most of them dingy and old-fashioned, stood in one corner separated a little from the rest.

"Nothing turns out right with me," sighed Parker.

Henry looked up from his work, at which he was whistling cheerfully.

"What's gone wrong now, Mr. Parker?" he asked. "We have been doing a pretty good business, and the repairs keep three of us pretty busy all the time."

"It ain't the garage that stumps me," said Parker. "It's my other investments. They don't seem to go right at no time, and that girl of mine costs me more with her fool ideas than I can raise easily. I never did have no sense for anything but the automobile game and every thing I go into costs me money. I'd get along a lot better if I stuck to the thing I know—but I always need more than I got. If I could get a little ahead I'd try a game that I know I could win at."

"Stick to the garage," said Henry. "It will make you rich in time."

"Not while I got an expensive family," retorted Parker. "I could get rich all right if I could raise a little money or get things done cheap enough. I know the automobile game, all right, and if I just had a car—any old kind of car—that I could enter in the Cosmopolitan, and it could run far enough and fast enough to make a pretty good showing, I could get all the money I want to build the thing and all the advertising that's needed to sell a whole mess of them. It ain't the car that counts, after all. You can sell any old car that gets a racing reputation.

"I've figured on building a car ever since they put on this five-hundred-mile race, and getting a lot of advertising that way. But think what it would cost to build one especially for the race! Have to buy a fine motor and get frames and transmission and steering-gear built especially, have axles forged and all the things that go to make up a car bought and assembled. I reckon that first car would cost me ten thousand dollars, and besides that I'd have to hire a driver and mechanician and pit-men and buy a whole mess of tires and things. I'd be lucky to get off at an expense of fifteen thousand, wouldn't I?"

Henry echoed Mr. Parker's sigh.

"It certainly costs a lot to build a first demonstrator," he agreed.

"Yet it's been my ambition to run a car in that race for years," said Parker sadly. "That's why I hired you, mainly. I got every faith in you, young man, and I knew that you could rig me up a good car if any one could. But what's the use? I haven't got any money to throw away nor nothing but four or five used cars I took in trade. And unless you can take parts from those traps and rig me up a racer out of them, I don't see how I'm to get in the game."

Henry looked at him and pondered. There was an idea germinating in his head as Mr. Parker had intended it should.

"If it means very much to you, Mr. Parker," he said slowly, "it's not beyond the bounds of possibility that I could get together some sort of car at very little extra expense. It wouldn't win the race, of course, but it would go the distance I think, and might even be up in the money.

"There is that old 1907 Grafton-Brown car that you got in trade from Doctor Bliss. That model was a leader of American cars when it was built. There never has been a better engine built than they put in those cars that year. It has been run about fifty thousand miles and it might need a new cylinder or two, but I think I could get considerable speed out of that motor, and it ought to hold up under the strain.

"There's a last year's Speed King that has a frame heavy enough to carry the motor. Let's go out there and look those things over."

Parker, looking almost hopeful, followed his eager steps from the shop. They went over to the group of cars that had been traded in on new cars and began to go over them carefully.

From one a transmission could be taken and from another odd parts could be utilized. There would have to be some things purchased or made, but the main elements of a car were there at hand. It would not be much of a car, and the chances of its winning any race would be exceedingly remote, but that he could build a fairly good car out of the material at hand

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and such as could be purchased for less than a thousand dollars, Henry was positive.

"But," he explained, "you'd take a chance on whether it would go the distance or not. I can put together a car that will look all right and that will run smoothly enough and with speed enough to keep up, at least for a time. But whether it would go the full five hundred miles is another question. Frankly, I don't believe it would, and it might fall to pieces in the first hundred miles. As I understand it, you want a racer that will be entered under a certain name, and the plans for building the real car need not follow the racer at all, entering the race being merely for the advertising it will get. It would be a gamble, but I can build you a car out of that junk and it may go the distance."

Mr. Parker's mask-like face cleared a little.

"I never refused to take a chance in my life, young fellow," he said. "If you can build me a car for a thousand dollars, go to it and I'll see that it goes in that race with a good driver."

Henry dropped his tools and wiped his hands.

"Then," he said, "let's figure what we can use and how we'll put it together. Simms, you and Jake get those cars out and strip the body off that Speed King. Then take the motor out of the Grafton-Brown and bring it in here on the truck. Mr.Parker, we'll draw up a sketch of the parts we have and figure a little on what we must buy."

The two of them entered onto their task with something approaching eagerness and Henry soon found that, though his technical knowledge was limited, Parker had a head on him when it came to expedients. He was able to suggest the utilization of a good many parts that Henry would have overlooked, and had shrewd and practical ideas in plenty. The two worked until late over their task, and when Parker at last put on his coat they had roughly outlined the construction of some sort of fearful and wonderful motor vehicle that promised at least to run after a fashion.

Henry went home that evening feeling elated that his genius, which had been slumbering of late with nothing on which to exercise it, was at last to be utilized, if only in this weird fashion. He felt grateful to Parker for employing him when he was without friends and, though he knew that the man's schemes contemplated only the building of a cheap, assembled automobile in which his own engine could not possibly be used, he was determined to loyally help him in achieving his ambition. His own plans could wait while he helped out his employer.

HE AROSE early in the morning and hastened to work. He could not have expected to meet any but laboring men on their way to early shifts and he did not, as a matter of fact, expect to meet anybody at all that he knew. He was surprised therefore when a car drew up beside the curb opposite and a feminine voice called him.

"Mr. MacDonald! Where on earth have you been keeping yourself all these days? I have searched the town for you."

Henry turned with a leaping heart to face the fresh presence of Alice Tredeker. He had seen her at times from a distance during the past month or two, but never had encountered her face to face, nor had he ever hoped to, since he considered that it was only seemly that he should avoid her. Yet he had thought of her more perhaps than was good for him. Now he was both embarrassed and glad.

"I'm working," he said awkwardly. "I left the factory a good while ago."

"I know you did, and under what circumstances," said Miss Tredeker indignantly. "And that is why I have been particularly anxious to see you. I want you to know that I think it was shameful of father to treat you in that way—and that I hope he regrets it all his life."

"Thank you!" said Henry with fervent gratitude.

He could not add to this simple expression, however. His command of language seemed to have deserted him.

"Where are you going?" she asked. "I have just been taking father to an early train and am returning. If I can take you anywhere, I should be glad to do so."

Henry could only blurt out the damning fact of his present status.

"I'm just working as a mechanic with Parker's garage," he said. "I'm truly grateful to you, Miss Tredeker, but it wouldn't look just right for you to be taking me up there. I'm hardly presentable besides."

He looked grimly at his rough clothes.

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She understood that he would feel uncomfortable with her and acquiesced at once. But she had something to say to him and no consideration of conventions was going to deter her.

"Perhaps it would be better not to ride with me," she agreed. "It might cause you embarrassment. But I heard from father all about your threat to beat him in the race this year and I want to say that I hope you do it. He needs a lesson and I consider his treatment of you not only idiotic but cruel. I know you don't like to drive a fast car, but I hope you have gotten over the feeling you had about it and set yourself to qualify as a driver."

Henry dimly recalled his impassioned and melodramatic threat to Tredeker. Its details had almost escaped him, though his determination to show the manufacturer that his engine was superior to anything he had ever heard of still remained with the inventor. But how he was to heap burning coals on the head of Tredeker and carry out his vow had become secondary to the task of saving and working to build, piece by piece, his working model that should win him recognition. The idea of actually beating the Crescent in a race had been dismissed as soon as the first soreness of his dismissal was forgotten.

"I'm not doing it very fast," he smiled at the girl. "I'd like to drive a car and beat the Crescent, but I guess I'll never be able to accomplish it. I don't think I promised to do it this year anyhow. That would be a rather large order."

Miss Tredeker dropped from her seat to stand beside him on the sidewalk, determined to leave no doubt of her meaning in his mind. She was deeply in earnest and emphatic in her accent.

"Now, Mr. MacDonald," she said, "I was delighted to hear how you had defied father and I looked for you to do all you said you would do. If you're half as smart as he said you thought you were, you'd never rest until you had fulfilled that threat. Why, if I were in your place do you know what I would do?"

"No," said Henry, "I don't."

"I would build a car by hook or crook and I would hire one or steal one or borrow one, and I'd practise driving it until I got so used to it that the idea of being afraid would never enter my head. I'd qualify to drive a car in a race if it killed me—and I would drive one, too, and beat the Crescent so far that there would be no doubt at all about it."

Henry looked at her flushed face and gleaming eyes and knew she would do just as she said. But he felt that the enthusiasm and thrill that was running through himself was essentially a false feeling and would die when her presence was not there to stimulate it.

"It would be a childish kind of vengeance," he muttered.

"I don't care if it would!" she exclaimed. "Mr. MacDonald, I've stood up for you in the face of father's ridicule and asserted that you would do just what you said because I thought you had been badly treated and I had faith in you. But if you don't do what you said, I'll have to believe that you do lack courage, and that I have been stultified in my defense of you. Please, Mr. MacDonald, won't you try at least to make good with it?"

Henry felt the surge of determination to move the universe for this girl, but his native intellect caused him to hesitate.

"How?" he asked bitterly. "I haven't been in a car more than half a dozen times since—that last time. And then it was only to deliver a machine. I never drove one over ten miles an hour and I haven't an opportunity to ever drive one any faster. A thing like that will take a long time to overcome, and before I can cultivate nerve enough to sit behind the wheel of a racing-car in the Cosmopolitan I'm afraid I will be too old to qualify."

"You don't have to drive one," said the girl. "If you can overcome the fear of speed and merely get to be a mechanician it will fulfill the terms of father's challenge. I don't know anything about your engine, but I do know father, and if he made that bet with you that he'd build it if you beat his car, I know he will do it. Think what that would mean to you!"

Henry thought. The prospect was thrilling but remote. How was he to learn to drive a car, let alone ever get the opportunity to superintend the building of one according to his own plans? But stay! He was going to build a car, after a fashion. A car that was to go in that race and might——

But suddenly he burst into a laugh.

"I was thinking," he answered Miss Tredeker's reproachful look, "about the

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car I was going to build. You carried me away at first. For a whole moment I actually dreamed of driving or sitting in that car during the race and showing my exhaust smoke to your father's entry. But the joke was too much even for my enthusiasm."

She insisted upon knowing what he meant and he told her, bitterly gibing, of the fearful and wonderful aggregation of material with which he was to build a machine that would serve for an advertisement to market a new car. But Miss Tredeker seemed to find in the prospect more food for thought than for laughter.

"But," she said, "they say you claim to be a wonderful mechanic and a sort of inventive genius. If that is the case, here is your chance to show it. If I were you I would spend every cent I had and every spark of brains I could generate in making that car a real car. Then I'd learn to drive it, or at least be the mechanician of it, and I'd do just what I threatened to do. Oh, if I were a man, I'd not lie down and give up in the face of every little difficulty!"

"*Little* difficulty!" echoed Henry. "Excuse me, Miss Tredeker, but it doesn't seem so small to me. But even if I could build a car, how would I get over my hysterics every time I was carried faster than a walk?"

"That should not be hard," said Alice confidently. "What's the matter with your learning to drive my car?"

Henry looked at the automobile which she had left beside the curb, and caught his breath. It was not a Crescent. It's trim, raking lines and jaunty, powerful beauty bespoke a foreign design with loud insistence. It was a roadster, small indeed, and dainty in appearance, but even a novice would have felt the impression of devilish power and speed that emanated from it.

"Why, it's a De Chaud!" cried Henry. "What a beauty! What a beauty! The Baby De Chaud with the new motor that we worked on when I was with Dampièrre. The little rat that weighs fifteen hundred pounds and can burn a road at ninety miles an hour! Where on earth did you get it?"

"I liked the looks of it," said Miss Tredeker simply, "and made father buy me one, though he sneered at the idea that it was better than the Crescent. Could you run it?"

"I know every bolt in it," said Henry. "If I could learn to run a car in anything, it would be in that. That is the car that will win this year's race."

"Will it?" said the girl. "Well, I'll make a bargain with you, Mr. MacDonald. If you will promise me to build that car, no matter how, so that it will have a chance to beat father's entry, I will go out with you every day until you learn to drive this car at the limit of its power. Is that a go?"

The lean lines of the De Chaud fired Henry's mounting confidence and courage to the required notch.

"I'll take you up, Miss MacDonald!" he cried. "I'll build that car if I have to turn every cylinder myself, and I'll drive at every speed from ten miles to a hundred until I get my sand back again. But I can't accept your offer. It wouldn't look right."

"Never mind the looks," said Miss Tredeker firmly. "You are going to drive my car and I am going with you because I propose to see that you get the training you require. Do you work in the afternoons?"

"I do," said Henry. "But I have the privilege of selecting my own hours. I can work mornings and nights and take the afternoons off."

"Splendid," said Alice. "Then this afternoon I shall expect you to appear at our house at half past two with a duster and a pair of goggles. Then begins the first lesson!"

She gave him no time to argue the matter further but sprang to the seat of her little car and threw on the spark. It started on compression and she shot from the curb without giving Henry opportunity for a word.

IX

BY THE time Henry finished his morning's tasks, which were rather indifferently performed, his courage and fire had largely evaporated in the searing heat of reason. The enthusiasm with which he had contemplated revenge and rehabilitation gave place to pessimism. But he had the quality of stubbornness. Once having passed his word to undertake the task he would not turn from it.

It sickened him to think of abandoning his extra hours of work on his beloved engine to the hopeless waste of time involved in learning to travel at a hundred miles an hour without growing sick and he thought with real pain of the necessity of spending

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what he had saved and what he could earn, not in parts for his own invention, but to bolster up the crazy vehicle which he was building for his employer's benefit. But if dubious about the prospect, nevertheless, when noon arrived, he washed his hands and put on his coat without hesitation.

He walked home in the warm sunshine of early Fall, feeling strange to the hour and the brightness but cheered somewhat by escape from the gloom and grime of the shop into the clean, crisp air. The streets, which he had only seen for short intervals of twilight or dark, were glad and fresh to him. His whole attitude of mind was changing under some pleasant stimulus.

The blocks between the garage and his own faded boarding-house were soon traversed, and he felt again the impression of strangeness at opening the familiar door at such an unwonted hour. It might have been Sunday or a holiday to him.

Up the gloomy stairs he climbed, thinking of the ordeal that was before him, half glad that he was to share a seat with Miss Tredeker, half terrified at the spectacle he anticipated making before her eyes. He went on up to the third floor, his feet stirring the dust in the moldy carpets but making little sound. He came before the entrance to his room and entered it before he noticed that it was already occupied.

The drawers of the chiffonier were pulled out to various positions, some barely an inch, others a foot, and the contents had been disturbed and carelessly shoved back. Tails of shirts projected over the edges of one or two.

A dresser had been subjected to the same treatment, and the top of the table on which he sometimes drew had been strewn with the materials which he always kept neatly arranged upon it. A drawing-board lay on the floor and a T-square was upon it, instead of hanging on its hook at the side of the table.

His suitcase had been opened and dropped, after being found empty. The bedclothes had been tossed back and ransacked, and the author of all this mischief was even now impatiently dragging scraps out of a waste-basket and beating it against the furniture in some wild idea that he could pound out of its fabric something that it could not possibly contain.

On the table, among the litter of ink and instruments, lay the unbound roll of tracings that Marcella had returned to Henry.

"And what," inquired Henry very coldly, "are you looking for in my room?"

The intruder turned with a start. It was Verrens, white-faced and staring.

"Augh!" he gasped with a spasmodic intake of the breath. "I thought—where did you come from?"

Henry closed the door and leaned against it. If afraid of motoring at high speeds, at least he had no terror of physical encounters with other men. In fact he rather enjoyed the prospect.

"I might ask you that," he said. "Since when did you leave the automobile business to become a second-story worker, Verrens?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Verrens.

He was vainly trying to think out a course of action, and the only feasible excuse he could invent at once was that of drunkenness. He tried to force a note of maudlin thickness into his speech but only succeeded in making his discomfort more evident.

"Ain't this my room?" he demanded. "I—I thought this's my room. Whash you doin' in here?"

"It's no go, Verrens," retorted Henry. "I belong here and you don't—though it's pretty easy to see what *you* are doing here; and I might guess why you are doing it. But perhaps you'll tell me what you are looking for so assiduously and save me the trouble of guessing."

Verrens looked past him at the door and then around at the disturbed room. He was hesitating. Should he try to make a dash for freedom or attempt in some desperate manner to yet accomplish the object of his entry. Henry was small and did not look very powerful, while he was a big and labor-hardened athlete who should be able to handle one of Henry's physique quickly and with ease. In view of what he knew of Henry's courage it is not to be wondered that his own recovery of spirit was rapid.

The nervous fright left him swiftly and he began to figure ways and means of not only escaping but of accomplishing what he had come for. He suddenly advanced threateningly on the figure that barred his exit.

"Now, look here, young fellow!" he said fiercely. "I don't want to hurt you, and if you know what's good for you there won't be any need for me to do it. But just put

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your mind on this and loosen up. I come here for the sheet that was missing from those tracings you gave Marcella and I'm going to have it—see! I've looked everywhere in this box and it ain't here, and so I'll have to make you tell where you keep it. Come on now and spill it, before I have to take and wring your neck for you!"

"Are you sure you've looked everywhere, Verrens?" asked Henry mockingly.

"Don't try to stall me! I've been over this hole with a fine-tooth comb and I know as well as you do that it ain't here, kid. Where is it, bo—don't keep me waitin' because I'll slap you silly if you don't loosen up quick!"

Henry brushed aside the hand that was reaching for his collar.

"Wait a minute!" he grinned. "Just a second, Verrens! I've got a little bone to pick with you, and it'll be a satisfaction to pick it right here without calling the police and having you locked up. You're looking for that tracing, aren't you, and you want to know where it is? Well, I've got a notion to tell you, and see what you will do about it. It happens to be in this room and right before your eyes."

"Don't lie to me, you little rat!" snarled Verrens. "You've got it on you!"

"It isn't on me. Look over the door, Verrens, where the light isn't extra good. What's that you see there? And now what are you going to do about it?"

Verrens looked above Henry's head and made out something he had ignored utterly since he had been in the room. It was a plain oak frame, holding behind its glass a sheet of tracing-paper on which was drawn the vital parts of the great invention. His jaw dropped as he noted its conspicuous position and the carelessness that had ruined his plans of theft.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he remarked. "Stung!"

"And now," said Henry, "if you can take it away, you can have it, Verrens. But you can't take it."

"I can't!" cried Verrens, stung to rage by the knowledge that he had been fooled. "I'll show you about that!"

HE SPRANG forward to grasp Henry and hurl him to one side. He had not remarked the confidence of the inventor's attitude nor the contrast between it and the supposititious cowardice that was his heritage. He looked for cringing submission or, at the worst, screams for aid. Instead, he received a hard fist full in the face and reeled backward as his teeth clicked together with the force of the blow.

"Come on," urged Henry. "That was just a starter."

He came on, cursing with rage and still obsessed with the notion that his antagonist was contemptible. He struck out, this time, however, seeking to crush his opponent to the ground. His flail-like blow sang over Henry's head as the latter ducked, while the inventor's fist crashed into his mid-section with sickening force. Verrens staggered back, gasping, and nearly went down.

Henry was fired with mounting rage and a desire for revenge on this man to whom he attributed most of his troubles. His forced calm left him abruptly and he felt only the craving to mete out physical punishment on his enemy. Following his blow, he threw aside the advantage due to superior skill and quickness that was his and rushed to close quarters. He sprang upon Verrens and rushed him backward till they crashed into the table.

The tester braced against the wood as it slid to a stop against the wall and threw himself upright, pulling at the hands that gripped him. Henry shifted to throw an elbow across his antagonist's throat, and Verrens strove to save his neck by an arm passed about Henry's head.

They locked together and reeled away from the table, stamping the tracings under their feet, kicking the waste-basket and drawing-board across the floor and smashing into chair and bed. Verrens twisted Henry about and lifted him into the air. He brought him down in a swinging turn and crushed him against the door. But he could neither shake him off nor break the grip that held him.

Back and forth they swayed, jerking across the room and twisting in panting gyrations of force. One could hear shouts of alarm from below, followed by the rush of feet as other occupants of the house ran up the stairs. But neither Henry nor Verrens heard ought but their own sobbing breath.

Back and back they went, Henry pushing the tester whose superior weight and size availed him nothing against the ferocity of his foe's attack.

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With feet digging into the ripping carpet and back arched with his efforts, Henry hurled him onward. They struck the edge of the dresser and Verrens' back bent over it like a willow in a cyclone. His head snapped back from the iron arm that pushed it, and his skull smashed into the mirror. Glass rattled and tinkled about him. His own grip relaxed.

Henry's fist was smashing into his ribs, while his left arm was bending Verrens' chin backward and upward until the vertebræ seemed about to crack. The tester tried to call for help, but there was no vent left for the escape of his voice. His hands tore at the face that glared into his own, but the senses were fast leaving him, and only terror remained. He was done; whipped. But he could not find voice to admit it.

The landlady and a crowd of boarders and neighbors reached them in time to save Verrens. They had extreme trouble in pulling Henry off his victim, but the task was accomplished before the life was quite beaten out of the tester. He was in sorry plight, it is true, but he silently thanked Providence that he was still alive. He could not answer questions directed at him and he was so cowed that he would hardly have contradicted Henry anyhow. He lay on the bed and whimpered in the effort to relieve his congested lungs.

Clamors assailed his flushed and panting conqueror.

"*Mr. MacDonald!* What's the meaning of all this! Mr. Smith, is this the way you go on in a respectable widdy's house?"

Henry brushed blood from his face.

"Nothing but a drunken bum who wouldn't get out of my room," he explained hoarsely. "Let him go—and don't call the police. He hasn't done much harm except to the mirror. And I guess I've made him pay for that, all right!"

The woman was inclined to pity Verrens —or Mr. Smith—as having palpably suffered the most damage, but there was no denying the fact that he had been trespassing in Henry's room and deserved what he had received, though perhaps not such a quantity of it. Verrens did not attempt to deny the accusation. He was beyond denying anything. Aided by a sympathetic helper he was glad to rise painfully from the bed and creep out the door and toward his own room.

Heedless of the landlady's lamentations and threats, Henry wiped the blood from his face with a towel before he climbed on a chair and removed the frame from the wall. He took the tracing from it and rolled it with the others which he picked up from the floor.

"I haven't time to argue about your mirror!" he snapped, turning to the door. "Make that drunken bum pay for it or do it yourself. I won't! And if any more people make free with my room and possessions, I'll be asking *you* what you are going to do about it, Mrs. Copley."

This quieted the landlady, and Henry impatiently flung on a cap and departed. He went hurriedly to the street and hastened to a supply store where he purchased a pair of goggles and a duster. With these he boarded a car and started on his way to keep his appointment with Miss Tredeker.

He had thought little of his appearance, the broken mirror offering him no means of actually observing the effects of combat. Now, in spite of the cooling effect of the open air, his blood was coursing rapidly and his thoughts, if they could be called thoughts, were whirling in his brain. He was uplifted and excited, triumphant and confident. There was a truculent determination about him that stilled the comments that other passengers were inclined to make regarding his battered countenance and rumpled coat.

He felt inwardly that he was vindicated, and that any obstacle to his progress was, henceforth, not worth mentioning. He was drunk with victory and revenge and he thirsted for more worlds to conquer. The conductor looked at his flashing eyes and examined the nickel he tendered with care. There being nothing to cavil at in the coin, he decided that he would say nothing to his disreputable passenger.

HENRY was still mounting the clouds when he alighted from the car and walked across toward the wide boulevard on which the big house of Tredeker was situated. The great lawn and spiked iron fence closed with ornate gates did not daunt him. He tore open the portals and strode up the path as if the place belonged to him. Not a quiver was caused in his breast by the imposing stone *porte-cochère* beneath which stood the rakish De Chaud roadster in which he was to have his first test.

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He rang the bell at the entrance and, heedless of the stare of surprise with which the man who answered the ring greeted him, demanded in so firm a manner to see Miss Tredeker that the man choked back the order to depart and went doubtfully to apprise his mistress of the strange caller at the door. Henry sat down on the running-board of the car and waited, leaning on his elbows, cap pushed back jauntily from his torn features.

Miss Tredeker came through the door and tripped down the steps lightly, not looking up from them until she reached the last of them. When she did raise her eyes, her hands went up with them and her mouth remained open without uttering the cordial greeting which was on her lips. Then she cried:

"Mr. MacDonald! What on earth is the matter?"

"Nothing at all," said Henry with elaborate casualness. "Fellow tried to rob my room and there was a slight unpleasantness. And," he dropped his indifference abruptly and grinned with frank conceit and triumph, "I rather knocked him around a little."

"But you look *dreadfully!*"

"You ought to see the other fellow," boasted Henry. "He's about ready for the hospital! It was Verrens, Miss Tredeker, and he was after my plans. He didn't get them, though."

She questioned and he answered. A somewhat incoherent and excited conversation ensued, at the end of which Alice knew the entire story.

"But why did you let him go?" she cried. "You should have had him arrested!"

Henry grinned wolfishly.

"I wouldn't have done that for a farm, and I don't want to have you tell your father either," he insisted. "See here, Miss Tredeker, Verrens drives the Crescent in the Cosmopolitan and is supposed to be the best man on the team. If I should have him arrested or you should tell your father, he would be discharged I suppose. But I want him to drive in that race, and it'll be like winning two races to not only beat the Crescent but also beat Verrens driving it. Do you see?"

Miss Tredeker saw and smiled meaningly.

"Oh, you've just got to beat him!" she exclaimed. "If you don't, I'll never speak to you again!"

"That's all right," said Henry confidently. "I won't lose your acquaintance, I can promise you, Miss Tredeker. Beat him! I'll make him burn up his car to keep in sight of me!"

"I believe you will," she answered with devout admiration. "And we'll get to work now and start the course of training that will make you able to do it. Come on!"

Henry drew from under his arm the roll of tracings, all marked with heel-prints and stained with the dust of the floor.

"Wait a moment before we start, Miss Tredeker," he said. "Here are the things that fellow was after. I'm afraid to leave them where those thieves can get at them, for, could they get these and build my engine from them, I'm just conceited enough to think that no car on earth could beat them in any race. Won't you take them and keep them safe for me until after the race? I can't work on them any more until then."

Alice took them gingerly, flushing a little.

"And will you trust *me* with them?" she asked gratefully. "I'd almost be afraid to have a thing so valuable in my care."

"Trust you?" he repeated. "Why, of course I would! I'd trust you with lots more than that."

She flashed a smile upon him and what was left of his heart and head was surrendered to her without further hesitation. But she merely said she would guard them with her life, or words to that effect. Why she should blush and he turn red during this simple exchange is not apparent from the text, but so it was.

X

SEPTEMBER and October waned and the cutting days of November settled upon the city, chilling its dingy streets and smoke-grimed buildings into bleak dreariness. The frosts of approaching Winter whitened the brown leaves that covered the lawns each morning, and the roads that ran from the paved streets into the country became as hard and smooth as the macadamized boulevards.

The factories of this center of automobile manufacturing were taking advantage of this. Every day saw the stripped, gray test-cars roaring on the lanes of traffic. There were cars among them that were carefully guarded secrets, for some of them

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were to carry the colors of their makers in the great race the following Spring and were being tested out that all weaknesses might be eliminated before the final appearance in the weeks immediately before the contest.

And on those roads you might have seen, at times, a lean, foreign car of small size that smoked up and down the lanes beneath the bare-limbed trees at a speed that was marvelous in view of its apparent rating. In it a figure in stained duster and cap, with goggles that hid while they protected his face, leaning over the wheel which he gripped with nervous, sinewy hands, would pass the eyes of an observer like a storm-driven mist at such speed that his outlines were blurred and indistinct.

There were some frequenters of the highways that came to recognize the sustained, shrill rattle of the double chain-drive and to look with wonder on the man who sent that light car over the roads at such a frightful pace, especially since his companion, who shared his peril and his thrills, bending veiled head forward into the rushing wind of their progress, was a girl.

Such things get about in time and, though observers were loath to believe the evidence of their eyes, it was known that Miss Tredeker, with her foreign-built, waspish De Chaud, utterly unsuited as it was thought to be to American roads, had gone speed mad and was accustomed to spend her afternoons in being driven over country roads by a devil-may-care fool who handled a car with the recklessness of a Lancia and the skill of a Boillot. But none knew of the slow development of that skill and courage, nor of the days of careful, slow driving, gradually increasing in speed, that had gone to the making of it.

But it began to be whispered around that the man who drove that car as no tester dared to drive was none other than the fellow who was said to be a foreign expert of wonderful genius, whom Parker—Jim Parker, the gambler and all-around sport—had brought to the city that he might design and build a car that would beat the dreaded foreign entries that were, for the first time, seriously entered in the Spring classic.

Other things were also said: that Alice Tredeker had been fascinated by the Frenchman—or was he, as some declared, only a native who had learned all the secrets of the foreigners—and that, unless her father gave consent to her engagement, the town was likely to hear of an elopement.

But romance fed on this rumor, and it was soon understood that Alice had declared to him that he must win that race to win her and he had promised he would melt every brick in the Speedway before another car should come home ahead of the creation he was building.

To be sure, Marcella Parker, who should know what was going on in her father's shop, declared that the man was only that silly college fellow that Tredeker had discharged because he was too cowardly to run a car, and yet had the conceit to wish to show such men as Walker how to build cars. But she could not deny that he was building a car for her father nor that Parker was confident of its speed and loud in his praises of his designer's ability.

People went to Parker's garage and endeavored to enter the shop at the rear, only to be warned off by watchful mechanics. There was a mystery about the car, and it grew with each week that passed.

Parker said it would win, and he said so confidently. But he qualified his predictions cunningly, and every one understood that he did not want to tell all he knew for fear that the odds on it would be too short for him to make much in the betting. But it was a world-beater, if all that was said about it was true.

MEANTIME, every morning and evening, Henry worked desperately in the shops, spending his skill and knowledge prodigally on the impossible material available to him. In the afternoons he went out and dissipated his despair in the rush of wind in his face and the thrill of tense, wire-drawn intoxication that accompanied his expeditions with Miss Tredeker; and what had once been mere spasms of terror gradually passing into self-control and fearlessness.

She buoyed him up with energetic encouragement, making light of difficulties, ringing changes on the proud claim that determination could carry any fort, until he began even to dream of carrying one that appeared to protect herself from his ambition and infatuation. If he could win this he could win all! Why not? And her interest and growing intimacy told him it was no such idle dream as his working moments would declare.

He went from his drives to his work with

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renewed confidence each day, and took up the heart-breaking task of trying to get Parker to spend a little money on his car.

Parker whined and declared that he had none to spend, but perseverance won a little, and Henry by this time was so deep in his project that he spent his own savings when he must. Shops could be used if one paid for the privilege, and Henry paid. Axles were forged at his expense and steering-gear made to order according to his design. Cylinders were rebored and turned with infinite care by his own skilful hands. Wiring and assembling were done under his exacting eyes.

The heavy frame of the Speed King would be death to tires, so Henry drilled it out with cunning knowledge until it lost little in strength and enormously in weight. The engine was mounted, and the timing gained his painstaking attention until it was perfection itself. Wheels were selected carefully and the rims were calculated to carry the brand of tires which Henry was determined to use in the race.

But he said nothing of his own expenditures to Parker nor did he speak very hopefully of the car's chances. There was reason for this. In the first place he did not wish to arouse his employer's hopes too much. In the second, if Parker knew that such care went to the making of it and so much of Henry's own money to its perfection, he would have been still more reluctant than he was now to donate a penny toward the building of it. He complained bitterly that he must hire a driver.

"You could drive, yourself," he told Henry, "if it wasn't for the fool ruling of the A. A. A. that you must have a license and certain experience. But you don't have to have a license to be a mechanician, and I'm looking for you to be in the seat when the time comes."

"You know why I was fired from the Crescent factory," warned Henry. "It might be risky to have me in it."

"I can't help it," wailed Parker. "I can't hire no mechanician to drive with Huddings, and you've got to serve. You know more about the car than any one, anyhow. You are building it."

Henry smiled secretly and rejoiced that his employer's parsimony made his task the more easy in this respect at least. He had promised himself months ago that he would be in that mechanician's seat on the day of the race. But he was surprised at the mention of Huddings, who was reputed to be the most daring and resourceful driver that the industry had developed in this section.

He admitted that Parker might have some excuse for refusing to spend more than he could help, since he was willing to employ a man of Hudding's capacity and price. And that made it all the more imperative that Henry should build a car which the great driver should not be ashamed to guide around the brick track.

Then there came a day when even Tredeker sat up and took notice of the affair. Henry's homeward way led near the factory where he had been disgraced, and it was inevitable that he should some day meet his one-time employer. He encountered Tredeker on a December day at noon, while on his way to prepare for his appointment with the great man's daughter. He would have passed without speaking, but Tredeker would not have it so. He reached out a jovial hand and seized Henry by the arm.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I want a word with you, MacDonald."

Henry stopped and even smiled in answer to Tredeker's good-natured air. It was impossible to harbor a grudge against the manufacturer, and Henry, in spite of his eagerly sought revenge, felt that their contest was merely what Tredeker would call "a sporting proposition." There was actually no malice in it.

"I hear," said Tredeker banteringly, "that you've gone and taken me up in that bet we made. Well, that's what I like to see in a fellow. And I don't hold it against you that you couldn't do a thing if you hadn't gone and got Alice to help you. But you've got to win to get Walker's job."

"I've got to beat Walker, you mean," corrected Henry.

"Same thing," said Tredeker. "He's sworn he'll have the car that can turn the trick, and I believe him. He's got to, because I've told him that if he didn't make good this year he'd have to hunt another job. And he will. Walker is some designer when his blood's up."

"Is Verrens going to drive for you?" asked Henry with a grin.

"Yep," said Tredeker, as he cut the end off a cigar. "Funny thing about Walt," he added. "Something happened to him a

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few months ago. I guess he must have been drinking and got in a fight, because he was beat up pretty bad. It seemed to take the nerve out of him for a while and he couldn't drive for sour grapes. But I told him booze and racing didn't fit and that he had to take the pledge or get out. That fixed him all right and he's tooling a car as nicely as ever this last month."

"Glad to hear it," replied Henry. "It would spoil half the fun if I didn't beat him too."

Tredeker smiled on him.

"I like the way you talk, young fellow, and if what they say is true I've got to hand it to you for getting over your willies about speed. That was a nice piece of work even if you do owe it to that girl of mine. And ain't she a wonder? Say, why don't you come around and call like a white man, some day? Don't think I hold any grudge against you, young fellow, and I'll even admit, if it will cheer you up any, that I was a little off on you. You can have a job with the Crescent even if you don't beat us."

"Thanks," said Henry. "I appreciate that. But I don't want any job but Walker's, and the chance to build that engine for you. How about that?"

Tredeker sobered a little at his evident earnestness.

"That's a big order," he returned. "Do you really mean that you can beat Walker?"

"It was your own challenge," said Henry grimly. "If I beat his Crescent with a car of my own design, and with me in the seat, I was to have his job. Are you going to welsh?"

Tredeker removed his cigar and stared at the glowing end.

"I never welsh," he announced. "And if you can beat him, you should be a better designer than he is. It was a bet, all right, and I'll pay if I lose. But you'd better not count on it, young fellow, so come on back and take a job under Walker."

"After the race," said Henry, "I will come back and take Walker's job."

"I like your nerve and I'm hanged if I don't almost wish you luck," Tredeker laughed. "But I'd never hear the last of it from Alice if you won, so I can't quite do it. But come up and see us anyhow—and don't hold a grouch."

So Henry's acquaintance with Alice was regularized by this event, at any rate. He had little time to call upon her, it is true, but the knowledge that Tredeker did not object to the intimacy was welcome.

BY THE time the March winds had given place to the April rains the mysterious Parker Special was in readiness for the test runs. And, wonder of wonders, it was the timid, speed-frightened Henry that rolled her out on the paved roads to the edges of the city and threw the levers into high at the beginning of the rural districts. It was the pusillanimous theorist who, a few months ago, was terror-stricken at the very idea of rapid motion who sent the throttle wide open and heard the sputtering thunder of the exhaust as the black-painted machine picked up its gait and rumbled away on its trial trip.

It was the formerly pale inventor, now bronzed and hardened, who brought it back in the evening, spattered with mud and dust, streaked with oil and soot, grimy and hard driven, and climbed out of the bucket seat with a half smile of satisfaction. The old engine of the Grafton-Brown, with newly turned cylinders, had vindicated its ancient reputation and was running like a clock but with the power of seventy horses. Hardly a sign of weakness had shown to be corrected and such as there was would require little work.

And now Henry set himself to work to train a pit team. He selected his men from those who worked at the shops and set up a model pit for them to practise in. Every task that would fall to their lot was rehearsed until they were perfect in it and a system of signals was arranged by which every position and mishap to cars in the race was to be made known to the driver. In this he had the able assistance of Huddings, who had actually been engaged by Parker.

The driver had demurred to sharing a seat with a strange mechanician, but when Henry had accompanied him in several trials at the Speedway he ceased to object and even expressed himself as being more than satisfied with his assistance. He was a grim, silent young man, this Huddings, whose trap-like mouth and narrow gray eyes gave one the impression that it would take an event of more than usual magnitude to divert him from the pursuit of any object which he had in hand. He suited Henry and Henry suited him, though they were as

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far apart as the poles in temperament and disposition.

When the papers began to feature the entries in the great race and comment on them with more or less expert insight, it became apparent that Parker's car had impressed some at least of the scribes with astonishing force. In the *Despatch*, especially, Manners, the automobile editor, was darkly certain that a surprise was to be sprung. Almost every day he called attention to circumstances that nobody else had noticed but which he interpreted to mean that something marvelous was to develop when the race was run. There was even veiled mention of Henry's new engine, which became something entirely new and unheard of in principle, and was even hinted to be designed to run on a powerful explosive instead of gasoline.

Parker and Manners, it was known, were intimates; the editor had even been concerned in one of the former's sensational attempts to beat a sure thing some years ago when horse racing was still in favor. This was remembered and the conclusion naturally was that Manners had inside information regarding the new car.

The fact that Huddings, the best man in the country, was to drive it, made it certain that here was something good. If it were not a good car, such a man would not have been employed to drive it. Consequently a well-prepared public eagerly awaited the opening of the betting on the race, determined to back what should be a long shot, the local car that every one began to believe was destined to repeat and surpass the performance of the famous Behring, which had been entered without having ever been previously known and had almost won the second Cosmopolitan.

WHEN the books were opened in the various bars and cigar stands, the gamblers had taken notice of Dame Rumor. The foreign entries, the De Chaud and Bouchier, were favorites in the betting, at odds of six to one, while prominent American entries ranked just behind them. Among these was the Crescent, said to be of a new and powerful design, which was quoted at ten to one. Just ahead of it ranked the Parker Special at eight to one to win, four for place and two to show.

There was a rush to get money down at these odds. Among those who bet with the first was Parker, who invested five hundred dollars on his car to win. This occurred in the Morning Light saloon, where a book was being run by Jack McDuffy, the famous bookmaker.

When Parker made his bet he was heard to complain that business was so bad that he didn't have much to spare after the enormous sums that had been spent on the new car. To this a man who stood near and appeared to be somewhat the worse for liquor replied with a sneering laugh.

"S'lucky fer you, ol' man," he said. "That tin trap couldn't run a hundred miles if't had a mule to pull it. I'll take all the money you want to lay on that 'bus."

"Who the devil are you?" asked Parker, nettled.

The intoxicated gentleman assured Parker that he was a sport and that he had money to back him in the assertion. To prove it he waved an awe-inspiring bundle of bills and invited every one in sight to have a drink.

"Bet you anything you want!" he shouted. "Bet you the ol' Tinner's Dream don't finish the race! Bet you it don't finish hundred'n fifty laps! Bet you I can lick you!"

Parker, whose anger seemed to be mounting, was about to accept this wager and started to take off his ministerial coat, but the bartender put a stop to the imminent hostilities. But not to the recriminations, which grew more and more heated. Constantly the drunken stranger challenged Parker to put up or shut up and Parker bemoaned his poverty. Finally, goaded to desperation, he jerked another roll of five hundred dollars from his pocket and confronted the shouting challenger.

"Put up er shut up!" chanted his tormentor. "Ol' boat can't run hundred an' fifty miles! Bet you five hundred even she don't finish hundred and fifty miles!"

"Done!" cried Parker and slapped his money down while the imbecile stranger promptly covered it, calling loud attention to the kind of sport he was.

He taunted Parker to bet more, but that gentleman admitted with a groan that he could not raise a further sum. Manners of the *Despatch*, happening to be at hand, was appointed stakeholder and pocketed the thousand dollars.

The drunken man seemed to have got his mind set on belittling the new car. He

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challenged the bookmaker to duplicate Parker's bet and was promptly accommodated to the tune of another thousand dollars. Every one thought that the man was crazy and his subsequent conduct confirmed the impression. He sallied from the Morning Light to other haunts of vice, and everywhere he challenged all and sundry to bet their heads off against the proposition that the Parker Special would not run a hundred and fifty miles. It was too good an opportunity to be lost and numerous bookmakers and ordinary bettors seized it.

After an hour of free libations and busy wagering, the strange man had exhausted his resources and had bet something like fourteen thousand dollars. At this stage he disappeared for some time, and none knew that he had met Manners and Parker in a back room of the *Despatch* office, where he rendered a report as to his operations.

"Can you get down another thousand, Bill?" asked Parker, whose recent enmity toward this person had unaccountably given way to friendly intimacy.

"I could pretty near get down a million," said the betting man, now suddenly sober.

"Are you dead sure it's all right?" asked Manners, who was a little startled by the magnitude of the operation.

"Of course I'm sure," sneered Parker. "That fool has built the boat out of all the junk I had in the shops, and I haven't given him enough real money to build a pushmobile out of. The engine is a five-year-old Grafton-Brown that's nearly wore out and the frame come off a Speed King that weighed a million pounds without the engine and body. The transmission we got from a Sunlight roadster of the vintage of 1492 or thereabouts, and the wiring was done with scraps. That pile of junk will be lucky as Sin to hold together for ten times 'round the track. But it looks good."

The two men grinned in response to this, and Manners wasted no further words. He pulled from his pocket the roll that these two friends had so recently bet and, adding to it a further sum, handed it to the erstwhile drunk.

"Bill," he said, "take this and go out and get it down. There's the thousand that you and Parker bet and there's five hundred more of mine. Get it all down and come back and tell us about it."

And of all this neither Henry, the racing interests, nor the public at large had an inkling. Only the three confederates knew of the stage setting for Parker's Napoleonic and subtle coup.

XI

IT WAS the night before the fourth running of the Cosmopolitan Sweepstakes, the great five-hundred-mile race for which prizes of more than sixty thousand dollars, besides trophies that represented all the glory of motordom, were to be won by daring drivers and stanch cars. In the city the lights burned brilliantly, lighting up the clear warm evening.

Every bar and hotel was full to overflowing and the crowd that taxed the resources of the town was in about the same condition. Closing hours and restrictive laws were forgotten and license, joy and lavishness reigned unchecked by police or public opinion. The streets were deafened by the honking horns of motor-cars which bore the license-plates of every State in the Union and the shouts of their occupants.

The night wore on toward the dawn, while the pandemonium of the speed-mad crowd rather increased than lessened with the passing of the small hours. All night the strident racket was only interrupted and softened by the constant soft, rather sad and plaintive notes of a siren mounted on a car whose driver knew but one tune and that one "Nearer My God to Thee." This he played indefatigably as he drove slowly about the town.

With the dawn the roads leading to the Speedway took on their annual burden. Cars of every kind and degree began to filter out even before the early hour for opening the gates. By eight o'clock the roads were filled with long lines of vehicles, even an occasional horse being seen in the swarm of gasoline conveyances.

The endless lines smoked and trembled and rattled as the slow procession, blocked by its own numbers, jerked its interminable way on low gear. The smell of burning oil and boiling water from overheated radiators mingled with the cloud of brown dust which rose from the road, in spite of recent coats of oil which had been applied.

At the stations of interurban and steam railroads, car after car and train after train pulled up and spilled forth loads of people. The gates to the vast enclosure were filled with crowding, shuffling forms that pushed patiently ahead an inch or two at a time.

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Inside the gates, horsemen clad in khaki uniforms directed the stream of spectators to their places. The huge, far-stretching grandstands began to fill up as if a sluggish stream were flowing into them. The bleachers on the turns were already crowded, while the enormous field inside the track was rapidly being dotted with figures that from the distant grand-stands looked like swarms of black ants.

The murmur of the crowd crossed the track and reached to the neat garages where the cars that were to contest in the race were stored and guarded. The grimy men in overalls who worked calmly and busily with the big machines occasionally looked up and over the track at the endless streams of figures that climbed over the seats or settled when they had found their own places.

Such a crowd as this had never yet gathered at any sporting event, not even at previous Cosmopolitans. In the row of pits along the straightaway men worked assiduously at placing and arranging tires and irons, gas and oil and spare parts of all kinds.

Before the door of his garage Henry stood and contemplated the crowd, his courage at low ebb and his thoughts gloomy and bitter. He and others were about to die to make a holiday for these shouting, care-free, jubilant thousands, who only realized the danger in order to gloat over it. And to what purpose? For others there was glory and fame and the chance of fortune. But what for him? What for him, driving behind a crazy vehicle made up of scraps and junk, risking his life and genius more surely than any other man there, without hope of doing more than finishing the race somewhere in the ruck of unconsidered losers? The prospect of fulfilling his boast and of besting the Crescent loomed exceedingly remote to him then, as he brooded upon the populace that was to chéer him on while he risked accident and perhaps death.

He saw Marcella Parker talking to one of his helpers, a youth whom he had reprimanded sharply the day before for some carelessness, and gave her no heed, though her stare at him was supercilious and scornful in the extreme. She had passed out of his life and only remained as a shadow of shame to him that he should ever have admired her chemical pulchritude.

Her father had been there and gone to his seat in a box after pessimistically asking them to do their best. Marcella would probably follow him soon and go completely out of his ken forever, for he had cast all on this throw of the dice, and if he lost he was done for.

He did not know that Marcella, impelled thereto by Verrens, was exchanging opinions of himself with his pit-boy, which were not complimentary. Egged on by the girl, who expressed a vicious desire to see Henry beaten, the boy was declaring that he would "fix" the inventor in some dark and dubious way. The setting was ripe for tragedy, and over it brooded Henry, feeling as melancholy as Poe's raven.

Marcella went, and then came Mr. Tredeker and behind him, Alice. The day, which had seemed gloomy, immediately began to take on the aspect of bright May to Henry. The moment he looked on Miss Tredeker, the race seemed no longer hopeless. He faced Tredeker, who stopped on his way toward his own garage and gave Henry a sportsman's greeting.

"Well, how is the great car this morning? Hope it's in prime condition to give us a run for our money."

"Ready and fit to run circles 'round that hack Verrens is driving," said Henry.

The car was, in fact, ready and fit, but the idea that it could run circles around even a hack should have struck its builder as preposterous, and would have done so five minutes before, but Alice Tredeker was smiling confidently at him and his judgment had evaporated entirely. Tredeker laughed tolerantly and passed on to stop for a few moments before the garage that held the chief hope of the Crescent factory. But Alice lingered behind.

"You are going to win?" she asked, and the question was a challenge.

Henry looked steadily at her and, though his manhood was largely her own inspiration, it proved too virile for her now. Her own eyes veiled themselves under lowered lids and a warm flush that was no product of Henry's imagination suffused her face.

"It's quite an order," said Henry with a smile.

She mistook his tone and looked up quickly to encounter a very confident gaze.

"The bigger it is the more bound you are to fill it!" she exclaimed. "You are not going to quit now! You *can* win, and you must feel it. You can do anything if you only will it hard enough."

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Her interest, or perhaps some feeling that her excitement led her to betray, caused his eyes to light up with a new fire.

"I will win," he said.

That was all, but her eyes were veiled again for a moment. When they again raised they did not turn directly and frankly upon him. Instead, she cast a disturbed glance from their corners with her head bent. It almost seemed that embarrassment descended upon her.

"You must," she murmured and turned to leave.

She looked back half furtively as she went, and when she observed that he was still looking steadfastly at her retreating figure, she turned eyes front and hurried. But Henry watched her out of sight and then went to join Huddings, whistling and acting as if he had been strangely encouraged.

A BOMB exploded, marking the half hour before the start. The men were in the pits by this time, and everything was in readiness. Henry and Huddings and two helpers pushed the car out of the garage and donned their black overalls and hoods. Like shrouded Pierrots they took their seats in the buckets while one of the helpers heaved at the stubborn crank. With a crackle and roar the charge ignited and the thunderous note of the exhaust filled the air. The clutch slid in and the powerful motor jerked the big machine forward sharply. They rolled off toward the track, in the wake of other contestants.

The pit next to them, number twenty-four, was assigned to the great Bouchier, at which Huddings, unfamiliar with foreign cars, looked with curiosity and respect. But Henry shook his head and spoke to the Frenchman who drove it, using his own language.

Henry knew the driver, Grammont, and had renewed ancient acquaintance since the foreigner arrived at the track. He chatted with him a few moments and then turned back to Huddings.

"No chance there," he said. "The car will not hold the track on the turns at high speeds. Grammont knows it and doesn't expect to win. His people did not know the Speedway and merely entered this car to get a line on it. Watch out for them next year."

"That lets the foreigners out then," said Huddings in some surprise.

Henry shook his head and glanced at number eight, farther up the row of pits.

"The De Chaud has the race in its pocket," he answered.

"That little thing!" exclaimed Huddings. "What are you giving me?"

"I clocked it at a hundred and ten miles an hour on the back stretch day before yesterday," said Henry simply. "It will run like a watch, using little oil, little gasoline and few tires. In speed—no one knows its limit."

The bomb for the quarter hour exploded and the drivers and mechanicians, shrouded in their baggy overalls and hoods, lined up in a grotesque group before the photographer. Then, one by one, with huge noise of exhausts and enveloped in blue smoke-clouds, car after car rolled away from the pits to line up, five deep, across the wide track.

In six lines, with the president of the company that controlled the speedway seated in a roadster at their left and ahead of them, they stood, throbbing and rumbling, as the bomb at ten minutes and that at five exploded. The second picture was snapped and the photographer picked up his instrument and walked from the track.

THE last bomb exploded and the flag was waved. With snorts and puffs and belching clouds of smoke the cavalcade of giants moved forward behind the roadster of the president. Gradually they picked up speed, preserving their alignment well at first, and rolled past the far-stretching stands from whence the crash of cheering urged them on.

The old chill ran up Henry's spine as the pace increased to about fifty miles an hour. He looked helplessly at Huddings whose face was a calm mask. To relieve his feelings he then bent and worked the pump. It seemed that the mixture was not exactly right and he fussed with the air-valve, eventually leaving it as it was.

His nerves were jumping and his mouth felt like a heated firebrick. The long swing around the first turn was an ordeal almost as bad as that first ride which he had taken on this track.

At fifty or sixty miles an hour they swung into the back stretch and rolled down this at an even pace. Here Henry's discomfort

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left him and it was not until they leaned against the bank of the far turn that he felt any return of it, beyond a heavy thumping of his heart. By the time they had safely negotiated the last turn and headed down the straightaway he had completely conquered the slight return of panic and was sitting, with clenched teeth and right arm about his driver's shoulder, all tensed and ready for the initial dash.

The white roadster of the guide rolled to one side and turned into the grass beside the track. There was a sudden crashing diapason from exhausts as throttles were opened wide. Smoke whirled around them and the car in which Henry sat bucked under him with the violent increase of speed.

They could see little distinctly, but the shadowy shapes of cars flitted past them as drivers rushed for choice of position. A glance at Huddings showed him sitting quietly, unconcerned and keen-eyed, watching the misty track ahead.

The exhaust ceased suddenly as the car heaved up at the turn and Huddings cut out the engine. A moment later it broke into full sound and they went roaring around the banked corner, righting to even level for an instant and again swaying up on the back of the curve. Then they were in the back stretch and the engine was singing rhythmically and the great machine soaring swiftly over the smooth bricks that flowed beneath it in an endless stream.

Another sharp choking of sound and sputtering reëcho as the racing engine caught again, and they were leaning dizzily around the far turn. A moment of swooping and they had straightened out once more into the straightaway and were rocketing madly down toward the long line of pits, the pagoda and the noise-shaken stands. Then a blank whirl of figures, and the first lap of the Cosmopolitan was behind them.

Henry was numb and dizzy, but the old feeling of blind panic was not with him. He took hold of himself and shook the film from his eyes. Another glance at Huddings helped wonderfully in this recovery, for the driver was still looking straight ahead with no trace of expression on his calm face. The hands that held the wheel were as steady as rocks.

It was his duty to listen for telltale sounds that would tell them whether all was well, so Henry bent down to it. The engine was pulsing as steadily as a clock and there was not a sign of failure. He breathed a great sigh of relief and straightened up, completely himself again. A calmness of supreme confidence had taken the place of the old terror, gone now forever.

He was reminded of his tasks. They swooped on and on until the pits once more loomed ahead of them. As they went past he first glanced at his stop-watch and then at the line of pits. His practised eye caught his own men and noted they were ready with the signals. Two laps; and they were on the third.

When they came around again Henry leaned over and shouted "seventy-five" into Huddings' ear. The driver made no reply, but the throttle slid up a notch and the car responded. Then his mechanician set himself to gather some idea of the positions of the opposing cars.

One or two were within sight and he made out the number eight of the De Chaud. He could recognize, above the roaring of their own exhaust, the rattling whine of the chain drives. The little car was scooting evenly onward without a falter or a tremor.

"I wonder how fast he's going," muttered Henry.

He could not know, however, until his pit-men caught the time and signaled it. So he craned his neck to see if the Crescent was in sight. But he could not see it.

LAP after lap rolled away until it began to become monotonous. They were running evenly at between seventy-five and eighty miles an hour for the entire lap, though of course their speed was much greater on the stretches to make up for the time lost on the curves. The signals told them that the De Chaud was running in third place and that a Republic had taken the lead and was burning the track at well over eighty miles an hour.

They themselves settled down to about seventy-five and held that speed. After a while they had a brush with the big Bouchier and finally passed it on the far turn. As Henry had predicted, it was unable to hold the track at highest speed and was virtually out of the race already. The De Chaud, however, was hanging grimly to its place, content to let the pace-maker wear itself out. The race was young as yet.

A car roared behind them, gradually

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getting nearer and nearer. By the time the tenth lap was past it was less than a hundred feet in the rear and still gaining. Henry watched it closely as it crept up. The track cleared of smoke and he made out the number. It was eighteen—the figure that was borne by the Crescent.

"See what it will take to hold this fellow for a while!" he yelled into Huddings' ears, and the driver nodded without taking his eyes from the track.

Nearer and nearer crept the Crescent, driven like a storm by Verrens. It came up on the outside and challenged them as they swept into the turn. The stands shrieked as they scented a brush for position.

Huddings let out a notch and the Crescent took their smoke as they whirled around the turn. They held the lower edge of the track and there was no chance to pass them until the straightaway was reached. Here however Verrens bent to his task and drove to capacity.

Huddings answered the signals of Henry, who was carefully watching his rival. Side by side the two cars leaped down the stretch. The throttle of the Parker was now wide open. Air and oil-flow were adjusted perfectly and she was doing her best. The Crescent held its place but did not gain.

Henry motioned to Huddings and the speed was cut down. The Crescent drove ahead and its mechanician cast a taunting glance back at them as it took the lead on the far turn. But Henry only smiled through caked lips. His car could hold the Crescent. But he was sure that neither his car nor that of his rival could stand that pace for long. So they rolled swiftly through lap after lap.

At twenty laps the Republic faltered and dropped back to change a tire, burnt up by its mad speed. The De Chaud was in second place. Behind it was the Ohio, and the fifth car was the Crescent. The race was yet young, far too young to warrant a prediction. In eighth place, the Parker Special was running lap for lap with half a dozen other cars.

There was a crash and a sickening jar when they leaned against the bank of the far turn on the twenty-sixth lap. The car swerved, answered the firm helm and rolled along on three tires and a rim as Huddings cut down the speed. They limped painfully down the straightaway toward the pits, while Henry held his arms in a circle high over his head as a signal to his pit-men.

They crawled into the open space and the men swarmed over the walls with jacks and rims before they had stopped. Both driver and mechanician were there on the ground at once, and the bolts were being whirled off the wheel before it had ceased to roll. The axle was jacked up, the wheel stripped, the rim pounded on and the bolts twisted swiftly home.

Huddings leaped to his seat and Henry followed him. In forty-five seconds after they had drawn up they rolled out again and slowly picked up their speed. But they were now in twelfth place.

At seventy-five miles the Crescent went in for two tires. The delay sent them back to eighth place, so closely were a number of cars bunched. But by this time the De Chaud was right on the heels of the leading car, and that machine was plainly faltering.

At a hundred miles the little foreigner was leading by a full lap and there was no longer any doubt in most minds that, barring an unlikely accident, the French "baby" had the race already tucked away. The struggle henceforth was for places in the prize-list among the first ten cars to finish.

The speed, which had been maintained at an unprecedented notch while the first cars fought it out for the lead, slowed down until the De Chaud was rolling along at an even eighty miles an hour for each lap, and the others were averaging all the way from nearly that figure down to a bare sixty-five for the tailing, lame entries. Some there were who drove recklessly, lap for lap, striving to cut down the leads held over them. But these threw tires or broke parts until it was clear that such efforts would avail nothing.

LAP after lap and hour after hour rolled by until even the frightful speed became monotonous, rousing no emotion in the drivers. Cars dropped out and limped home for tires and oil and gas. Henry noted, after a hundred and fifty odd miles had been run, that a wrecked car lay in the grass, twisted grotesquely and almost hidden by a curious crowd of spectators, but which car it was and the details of the accident he could not know until he came in to the pits again.

Another tire thrown about noon, the

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third they had lost, gave them opportunity to snatch sandwiches which they munched as they drove. Other drivers had reliefs, but Huddings must drive the entire distance alone. That iron man did not waver, however.

They knew nothing of the storm that had passed over a section of the grand-stand when the car shot past the wire for the sixtieth time. They had covered one hundred and fifty miles without a falter.

Fifteen thousand dollars had been wagered on the apparent certainty that they would collapse before that mark had been reached, and Mr. Parker, supposedly proud owner of the Parker Special whose creditable performance was beginning to arouse enthusiasm, was unaccountably maddened. He swore and cursed and discharged Henry a thousand times. His stormy denunciation echoed above the thunder of the booming cars below him.

Henry did not know that he was discharged, nor did he care. He was watching the signals that told him that the Crescent was now in twelfth place and that he was in thirteenth. Surely and certainly, the Crescent was dropping back and the Special was closing the gap between them. Henry smiled grimly and bent again to his sweetly running motor, blessing that ancient genius who had put magnificent material and work into it.

Two hundred and three hundred miles swept behind the dizzily racing cars. Lap after lap was reeled away. Car after car went limping from the fray or drew up and was abandoned beside the track. The field was cut down from thirty to twenty-five, to twenty, and finally to eighteen. And still the Parker Special hung grimly in the race and now had passed the Crescent for eleventh place, a car ahead of both having been retired.

There had been one death and several injuries, most of them minor. Six cars had been wrecked. The others had broken down in some vital respect or other.

The four-hundred-mile mark was passed. The Parker Special was in tenth place and within the list of prize-winners. Behind it hanging on in turn was the Crescent, desperately driven to gain a foothold among the elect few. The remaining cars were all good, tried campaigners and there was little chance that any would go out unless wrecked.

The Parker held its place because it used fewer tires than the Crescent, and not because it was faster. Time and again the latter had challenged, twice it had passed the black machine, but always, when it seemed that it would take and hold the lead, a tire had blown and it had fallen back again. Grim and cool, Huddings drove to schedule and events were proving him right.

The afternoon waned and the laps flowed steadily beneath them. The strain was becoming terrific, but neither Huddings nor Henry heeded it. Tired, black with soot and smoke, streaked with oil, they hung to their task and drove with grim skill.

One hundred and sixty laps, one hundred and seventy, one hundred and eighty, were hung up on the score board. Far ahead of them the De Chaud romped toward the final laps with all rivals far in the rear. It had not been headed since it took the lead at eighty-five miles.

They heard the wild and frantic cheering that told when the Frenchman got the flag for the last lap and the storm of sound that told how he had come home in front. But they still had far to go and who finished first, second, or third did not concern them. Their task was to beat the Crescent.

At each lap they heard cheers for the cars that got the flag in turn. They had many laps to cover as yet, but they held tenth place in their hands, while the Crescent was four laps to the rear of them in eleventh, just outside the money.

"Tire!" yelled Henry at the hundred and ninety-fifth lap.

Huddings nodded, and as they passed Henry gave the signal, not only for a new tire but also for oil and gas. They slackened no particle of their speed until they had swung into the stretch again and they had lost little enough time when they came to a stop at the pit.

But there were two worn tires and Henry ordered both renewed, in a voice that was a treble scream. He worked feverishly and did not watch the pouring of the gasoline as he should have done.

A pit-boy, for the first time free from the searching supervision of the mechanician, seized the only opportunity the race had presented. He did not dare do much. But he grabbed the can of gasoline and slopped it recklessly over the funnel, hoping to let most of it escape.

Henry did not heed it, and the attempt

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was futile enough; for enough was certain to reach the tank to carry them over the remaining distance. The call for gas had been only a precaution.

Meanwhile the crowd was shrieking for the Crescent, which had seized an opportunity and was being driven like mad to catch and pass the halted Parker. Verrens bent over his wheel and urged his car to the last ounce of its speed. A lap and another was almost gained when the Parker rolled out of the pits and, cheered on by its shouting partisans, took up its march toward victory.

THEY went crashing over the next lap, and the next, before Henry became aware that something was wrong. A terrible lump came into his throat and his heart became constricted.

Were they to fail at the threshold of such a victory as never yet had been heard of? Was this miracle of a car to falter and stop as the goal was in sight? No, not if he had to push it home in front.

But there was something wrong. There was an unusual smell of heated metal. There was a sound in the engine. It was groaning as if hard pressed. Henry looked at the score board as they passed it. Two laps and only two to go!

Something was wrong! He had not noted that gasoline was slopped over the car when they left the pits. He had not dreamed that vapor had spread over the engine itself, through pipe lines and cracks in the bonnet. There was a leak and disaster was at hand.

On the last turn before they swerved into the straightaway to receive the checkered flag that should urge them to the final lap, a flame crept through the hood and flickered wickedly before them. Henry breathed a sob of despair. Huddings' face worked silently as he started to move the throttle.

The act made Henry frantic. He had fought too hard and done too much to give in now. He reached out and grasped the fingers that would have pushed the throttle.

"Never mind the flame!" he screamed. "—— you! Drive! Drive!—Drive hard. We must not—lose!"

Huddings looked at him and obeyed. They swept down the stretch at the same speed, and the flag waved above them as they passed under the bridge. Before them was the Crescent, the mechanician glaring back at them while he urged Verrens on to new effort, sure now of triumph, for the rival car was on fire.

The stands shrieked as the car, failing to stop, rushed past like a meteor with the flames creeping up the radiator and wrapping about the hood. In the driver's seat sat a still, grim figure. Beside him, a begrimed and shrouded gnome stood up holding to the seat with one hand while he ripped with frenzied hands at the leather-covered padding of the bucket.

They saw it come away in his hands and bellowed approval as he leaned over the dash and beat at the livid tongue that lapped into his face. Thus that immortal car swept around the turn on its last lap, while Henry hammered the flames that at any moment might reach the gas and send him to eternity.

How long he fought he never knew. Smoke and heat choked and seared him. His hands were blistered, but he heeded nothing. They must finish! Hours passed before the last curve was behind them and they rolled down the stretch toward the pits and victory. And, as he lay out on the hood and pounded at the leaping death, he knew that he had won!

So they finished tenth at the fourth running of the Cosmopolitan Sweepstakes, with engine in flames and Henry beating, with blackened hands, the fire that threatened the lives of both.

Records state that sand thrown on the engine saved the car.

"Let me go!" cried Henry to the mob that cheered his deed. "I want to—claim—my job!"

But Tredeker was already there to bestow it. And behind him, Alice smiling through glistening tears, pitying yet triumphant, welcomed him to it.

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A Temporary Trade in Titles

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Hookum Hail" "The Soul of a Regiment," "Gulbaz and the Game," etc.

THERE were six lean feet or so of Charlie Ross, and he was quick on the draw, hook-nosed, hawk-eyed, and honest. There were nine other perfectly good reasons why he should be Sheriff of Tentown County, but those will suffice to introduce him. After all, the chief reason was that the boys elected him, and he made altogether good.

Sam Poole was the same sort of man, but younger; and when Sam was pitchforked out of England and came West to enjoy his younger son's prerogative of getting a living for himself, the Sheriff was good to him. Sam's education had included horsemanship, boxing, and wrestling, which in the Sheriff's eyes were virtues that would cover many sins.

But Sam had yet another virtue, courage —part of the legacy of birth that from generation down through generation had made the family name loom large; his fearlessness cinched matters, and Charlie loved him. So when Sam Poole's elder brother died, and Sam went back to England to take up the title and revel in the six-figure income that went with it, Charlie Ross was inconsolable.

He waited one whole year for tidings of his erstwhile protégé, but none came. Then he saddled his horse and went out to "get" a bunch of bad men who had taken too many liberties of late. He got them, sure enough, but he was still inconsolable, and even the hanging of his prisoners after fair and open trial failed to restore his customary pleasant view of life; he yearned for Sam Poole's company, and Sam was five thousand miles away and did not write.

So one fine morning he packed his store suit into a valise along with his sixshooters and started out to cross the broad Atlantic. He had vowed often that he never would cross it, for he had prejudices about monarchical institutions, and like every other part of him his preconceived opinions were dyed in the wool, a yard wide, and thorough. But he just had to see Sam.

His education had not included seamanship, so the Atlantic took her tribute from him and made him wish he had kept that oft-repeated oath of his. For the first time in his eventful career Charlie Ross lay on his back and groaned, while lesser creatures walked about and gave themselves airs; it took all the stiffening out of him, and filled him with an utterly alien fear of what might be ahead. So when he at last reached England he was plastic for impressions.

He felt lost at once among the orderly,

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sleepy-looking English docks. The stuffy little railway carriage that they locked him into made him feel like a bear in a trap, and he paced up and down in it from side to side, glaring through the windows—until the little fenced-in fields, and the trim hedgerows, and the cultivated banks beside the line bewildered him, and he had to sit down hard and stare at the partition opposite, for fear that his head might burst otherwise.

The British aristocracy was one of several things he had not thought it worth his while to study; beyond reading of a lord or two in an occasional newspaper; and disbelieving what he read he had never given them a thought. He had always continued to think of his good friend Sam in cowboy kit, up to his usual larks probably, and he wondered as he came along how there could possibly be room for Sam among those twenty-acre paddocks with a fence at every end of them—Sam, who had shown him a clean pair of heels many a time over seventy miles or so of rolling prairie.

He was homesick and bewildered to the lonely backbone of him by the time that they unlocked the carriage door and let him out to browse on the sleepy little sunlit platform, where everything was prim and neat and the hollyhocks peeped at him from beyond the station railing. For a few minutes he browsed in discontent, looking sidewise at the hollyhocks and spreading his big, broad shoulders at them, as if they stood for all he hated.

He, Charlie Ross of all men, was hard put to it to screw up self-respect enough to dare ask questions of the station master! Vaguely he remembered that Sam had changed his name, and he naturally did not know that mere accession to a title would have made no difference to Sam's friends; he did not think that they would continue to address him as Sam, or that the station master would know him as Sam Poole. He expected some trouble in finding him.

"I'm looking for a young man who used to be called Sam Poole," he ventured. "He's changed his name, and he lives somewhere hereabouts. Know him by any chance?"

The station master eyed him carefully; he seemed in doubt whether to send for the police or not. Charlie proceeded to jog his memory.

"Big man—looks like me. Same size and weight—countryman of yours, though, up to mischief half the time, and——"

"Do you mean Lord Radford?" asked the station master with a note of pity in his voice.

"Maybe I do. He's Lord something. Was his name ever Poole?"

The station master pointed with a thumb across his shoulder to where a banner waved proudly above a small forest of elms more than a mile away.

"That's 'is Lordship's place," he answered. "When the flag flies, then 'is Lordship is in residence."

"And that's Sam Poole?"

"Was."

THE station master went about his business, not at all aware of even mild absurdity. But the Sheriff's sense of humor was returning, and with it his recollection of the man who had been more than brother. Sam, with a fifty-foot-by-thirty banner up to prove he was "in residence," was too much of a joke; and he sat down on a little garden-seat affair, and laughed until the tears ran from his eyes, and rocked to and fro in breathless, thigh-slapping paroxysms.

He laughed until the little railway station echoed, and the station master came and ordered him away. Then he picked up his valise and toted it, still laughing, in the direction of the elms, and the banner, and the human cause of all his mirth.

But presently the big lodge gates, with age-old dragons on their posts supporting bronze coat-of-arms, loomed up in front of him. They had almost a religious atmosphere, and that scarcely agreed with what he knew of Sam. He began to feel glum again and ill at ease.

Then the park that lay inside them, with its browsing deer and stately avenues of trees, made him feel smaller than his native prairie had ever done; and the stately pile at its farther end appalled him. He felt sure that the Sam he knew could never live and move and have his being in a churchy-looking place like that.

However, he remembered that he was a brave man, not one to be turned back by man or beast or weather before he had reached his destination; and he walked on with a straight back, straight on up the avenue—straight to the carved, medieval porch; and rang the bell that hung above it.

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He rang it like a man, using his strength on it, and it boomed like a church bell. It kept on booming for three minutes, and Charlie looked up at it and wished he might shoot the thing to pieces with his two six-shooters; he felt more afraid of it than of anything he had yet encountered in his life. He stood there, though, unflinching, and when the door divided suddenly in front of him he was ready to greet Sam with the cold dignity that seemed in keeping with the situation.

He half expected to see Sam open the door himself, and for just the ten-thousandth fraction of a second he supposed that the footman in canary-colored stockings and a suit of clothes to match was his old cowboy friend risen to greater things.

When sense flashed back to him the sight of the flunky raised his dander; he demanded to see Lord Radford with the eye and the voice of a Sheriff holding up a gunman, and the flunky actually quailed before him. It was a minute before the servant recovered sufficiently to demand, "What name, please?" in a voice that had been trained for years to a pitch of brazen insolence.

"Tell him I want to see him!" ordered Charlie Ross. "I haven't changed *my* name—it's what it always was, and he'll call me by it when he sees me!"

The footman closed the door on him abruptly, and went to call the butler. The Sheriff, utterly determined, set his grip down on the upper step and stood his ground. He had to wait five minutes, thinking all the while how different his friend Sam's reception would have been had circumstances been reversed, and had Sam called to see him in the States.

The butler, when he came at last, was courteous but noncommittal. He was surprised at nothing. He was careful to make that much evident. His Lordship was at home, certainly. He would inquire whether his Lordship would see the gentleman, but his Lordship was entertaining guests at the moment. What name should he say?

"Ross," snapped the Sheriff. "Tell him Charlie Ross!"

Each had detected something out of ordinary in the other. Charlie Ross sensed the butler's dignity—his pride of place and trust and service—or he would not have told his name. The butler recognized ingrained authority, and the eye and bearing of his better. He left the door open while he waddled off to bear the message.

Charlis Ross could see him down an age-old oaken corridor, standing in a doorway. He could see the man's expression change, as he announced who waited. He heard a roar of, "What? Who did you say?"

There came a bellow of joy into the hall, followed by the crash of an overturning table. A second later, like a flash of lightning trying to overtake its thunderclap, Sam Poole burst forth, cannoned off the butler's paunch and sent him sprawling, stared hard for one breathless second at the travel-stained giant in the doorway; then tore down the hall and crushed him in a python-like embrace.

"Charlie, you old skate! You, Charlie! Why in —— didn't you come sooner?"

"Durn you, why didn't you write?"

"—— it, you know I never write! Come in! Come along in, you old scarecrow, and ten times welcome! Gad! This is good! Who'd ha' thought it! Charlie, you old son of a gun, I'm glad to see you!"

It was the same Sam. He paused a moment to damn the butler—damned him in heaps; damned him for a useless, senseless idiot because he dared keep the best man on two continents waiting out-o'-doors, damned him piece by piece, beginning with his eyes and ending with his ought-to-be imperishable inner man, then damned him all over again from the beginning and sent him off for drinks.

Charlie Ross submitted to be pulled and pushed into a huge reception room, and found himself at once more bewildered than he had been yet. He was pushed forward into a crowd of people who were talking in a clipped-off, all but alien tongue. Every single man and woman of them was a "dude," and they all stopped talking the moment he appeared, and stared at him wide-eyed.

The thing they knew that he resembled most in his store suit was a gamekeeper in Sunday clothes; but a gamekeeper with Sam's huge arm around his neck was a thing that could not be, and there was nothing for it but to stare at him and wait for developments. Then came another lightning change in the kaleidoscope.

The moment Sam announced his name they were around the Sheriff in a cluster, eager to shake hands with him.

"Heard of you a hundred times! Can't

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say how glad I am to meet you! Any friend of Sam's, you know! 'Pon my word, we'd all come to think you were one of Sam's inventions—awfully glad to meet the real thing!"

Nobody cared how he was dressed, or how his accent rang. They hailed him as a man and a brother, and asked him a hundred questions all at once, vowing that Sam's word for him, given a thousand times, was quite sufficient. Not one of them but hoped he had come to stay at least a year, and gladly—gladly from the bottom of his grown man's heart—Charlie Ross admitted that there wasn't any warmer welcome even in the States.

HE BEGAN to feel better yet, when he had helped Sam and the rest of them to drink a quart of most amazing whisky in memory of old times, and when he and Sam had danced a fandango, prairie style, and had responded to two encores, he knew himself for a man among his equals.

When a great gong boomed along the hall, and he was told it was time to dress for dinner, he was ready for anything on earth, and he did not even voice objection to arraying himself in one of Sam's dress suits. He did not even kick the man who came into his room to "flunky" for him, as he called it, but submitted to have his studs put in and his shirt held out for him with the grace of a seraph.

II

IT TOOK him ten or fifteen minutes to get used to the idea of having a man in livery behind his chair, and to having his glass filled up for him before he had quite emptied it; but from the moment that he "found himself" that first dinner that he ate at Radford Hall became the star event that had happened in the Sheriff's life to date. The new atmosphere was good, after a strange new fashion quite its own.

Before long he discovered that his own ideas and his own viewpoint were as strange and interesting to his new acquaintances as theirs were to him. He ceased, then, to keep watch and ward over his tongue, and opened up with his full flood of native Western wit until the room rocked with laughter.

Sam, at the head of the table, was satisfied to toss him a question or a word of reminiscence from time to time, to keep the flow of talk at flood, and to lead the thundering laughter that greeted the conclusion of each anecdote. Charlie Ross found himself in the limelight, not by any means for the first time in his adventurous career, and he kept his head and did well by the land he represented.

Before long he tired of telling everything and learning nothing. He wanted to get behind the mental attitude of these new friends whom he half despised still from force of habit. He was losing his contempt for them fast, but he would have liked to lose it faster, for Sam's sake; and he made a move to turn the channel of talk the other way.

"What does it feel like to be a Lord, Sam?" he asked during a momentary pause.

The butler rattled some silver dishes a little loudly on the sideboard, but his back was turned and no one saw him smile. Not one of the footmen quivered. But there was an instant burst of laughter from the guests, and a volley of good-natured banter was addressed to Sam, that put him on his mettle for an answer.

"Tell him, Sam! Go on, tell him! Silence—the secret sensations of a Lord!"

"It doesn't feel bad, Charlie. You see, it runs in the family, like gout and misbehavior. One takes to it naturally."

Charlie Ross was much more interested than they thought him. That and his next question were by no means asked at random; he really wanted to find out.

"Then you mean that a man's got to be born to it, before he can hold down the job?"

Sam did not answer. He preferred to be humorous, and he was waiting for inspiration.

"Say, if that's the case, Sam my boy, why doesn't the rule apply both ways? You came out West, and you were raw. Nobody who hadn't seen you would ever have believed afterward how raw you were when you started in. But you made good, and you were born to be a lord. How d'you account for that? D'you mean that I couldn't fill a lord's position, if I was to try?"

Sam was silent for another moment, but his eye was twinkling, and a grin passed all around the table. A joke was being born, a most tremendous joke, and everybody present sensed its coming, although no one could

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have named the gist of it as yet. Only amusement had begun to flicker round the corners of Sam's mouth, and they knew the symptoms. Charlie Ross recognized them, too; in the old days, back in Tentown County, when Sam had looked that way the countryside had generally held its breath.

"Would you like to try?" asked Sam suavely, blandly, but with that twinkle growing every moment brighter.

It was up to the Sheriff now. He had done no boasting, but Sam had boasted for him, and the Sheriff had let it go without a protest. Sam had introduced him to his other guests as a man who would take any kind of chance, either by way of duty or amusement, and had told them true stories in corroboration. Here, now, was the opportunity to prove Sam's judgment of him, and the Sheriff felt himself the focus of all eyes. Without being able to see behind him, he knew that even the butler's muscles were all rigid with suppressed excitement. After all, it could be nothing more than a tremendous joke.

"I'll try anything once," he answered with assurance.

Pandemonium was loose that instant. Every living soul in the room, except the Sheriff, saw the point at once, and yelped with delight.

"You shall," said Sam, swallowing emotion of some kind with what looked like a tremendous effort. "You shall be Lord Radford for one day."

"Which day?" asked the Reverend George Poole, Sam's second cousin, remembering his cloth and reputation.

"Tomorrow."

"But—man, you can't."

"Why not?"

"Blackheath comes tomorrow."

"That's the whole idea," said Sam. "We'll be able to amuse his grace."

"Good Gad!" said a red-faced, hard-riding local squire. "This'll be the greatest joke we've ever staged in Radford!"

"Don't! Now, take my advice for once and don't," urged the Radford vicar. "Why, Blackheath will——"

But they laughed him down. They laughed until the table rattled with its load of seventeenth-century plate, and the old low ceiling shook, and the wine was spilled, and the great hounds that Sam always had in the room with him threw up their throats and bayed.

"Who's Blackheath?" wondered Charlie Ross, when they had laughed themselves tired and he could get a word in edgewise.

"The Duke of Blackheath," spluttered a lady on his right—another second cousin of Sam Poole's and an able adherent in any deviltry afoot."

"Stuffiest Duke we've got," laughed a man across the table. "Dignity, you know, and all that kind of thing. Little man—big notion of himself—rich as Crœsus, mean as a miser, and no sense of humor. Never seen Sam yet, but a great friend of his late father's—coming down tomorrow to lay a foundation-stone. Oh, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ho-ho-ho! Oh, Sam, this is the biggest thing you've thought of yet!"

"It'll be a joke," admitted Sam. "It surely will."

The laughter continued unabated for at least ten minutes longer, and Charlie Ross was hard put to it to extract another word of information. The Reverend George Poole was the only man who raised a voice in opposition; he left his seat, and came round to lean over the Sheriff's shoulder.

"Don't do it," he advised. "A joke's a joke, but this is going too far. This'll get Sam into trouble."

"From what I know of Sam he kinder takes to trouble," smiled the Sheriff. "Can he lose his job?"

"How—lose his job?"

"Can they take away his title?"

"Dear me, no; nobody can do that."

"Or his cash?"

"No."

"Then it's up to Sam. What he says, I'll do!"

"He's my size," said Sam, leaning back in his chair to size the Sheriff up; "and he looks enough like me to answer to a casual description. Blackheath'll think I aged a little in the West; that's all."

"Trot out the details!" suggested Charlie Ross, and they adjourned to the billiard-room in a gale of merriment to formulate a plan.

"He ought to wear the robes," suggested somebody.

"I haven't any." Like many another member of the House of Lords, Sam had never in his life been inside the building; he had had no excuse for wearing robes.

"Then make some! Rake up some old ones!"

At a coronation and on the first occasion

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when he takes his seat are about the only two occasions when a peer wears robes, but that fact did not stop a sub-committee from being sent forthwith to ransack old chests and closets with the butler's aid.

After a search of half an hour they came back with a crimson-and-ermine thing that had belonged to Sam's great-great-grandfather, and a coronet that lacked one ball. It took twenty minutes to improvise a ball of putty and paint it to look something like the rest; then the whole was tried on Charlie Ross, and he admitted himself that he looked fine in it.

The rest of the evening was spent in coaching him, in infinite and minutest detail, amid howls of irreverent laughter and to the occasional desultory protest of the vicar.

To add to the joy of the universe at large, and to the utter confounding of the Duke, it was arranged that Sam and Charlie should change places for the day, and Sam should act act the part of Sheriff on a visit; each was to act as he saw fit when the day came, and the village was to be taken into confidence, so as to prevent accidents. And, since all games must be standardized and have a set of rules, it was agreed to and laid down that Charlie Ross might have any coaching he desired that evening, but that after dawn he was the Earl of Radford, and must give his own orders and run everything.

It was dawn before they had finished talking, and he gave a most amazing lot of orders before they laughed themselves up the carved oak stairs to bed.

THE Duke had qualms. He distinctly had qualms. He had never been "out West" himself, but he had read a lot about it, and he understood that men learned rough habits there. He remembered having heard that a lack of reverence was one of Sam's characteristics, and he hoped sincerely that the present Lord Radford would remember in what mutual respect his father and the Duke of Blackheath had held each other. He grew more and more doubtful on that point as his train drew nearer to Radford Station.

But whatever his premonitions may have been, he had expected nothing even remotely like the reception that awaited him in grim reality. He stepped out on to the platform, smiling his condescendingest—and then stepped back a pace and stared.

Tall-hatted, frock-coated, immaculate, immense, a hawk-nosed man stared back at him, whose very aspect froze the marrow in his bones; he had the dignified bearing of a savage warrior, and an eye that there was no avoiding. The eye seemed able to read into the little, mean, hidden corners of his soul, and to be disgusted with them.

This apparition of a man was backed up by a crowd that seemed to be restrained from unholy mirth by yet another terror of a man—as broad-shouldered and erect and huge, but less than half as dignified—who wore a red shirt, and loud checked trousers tucked into high black boots. His spurs could be heard jingling above the noise of the departing train.

The Duke looked at the train, half minded to make a jump for it, but realized he was too late. Around his neck this second apparition wore a loosely knotted colored handkerchief that would have scared a bull to frenzy, and his waist was decorated with a double bandolier belt, supporting ordnance on each hip.

"Go ahead. He's your mán—wade in! Tell him welcome to our home!" hissed Red Shirt in an audible aside; and in deadly silence the hawk-eyed savage strode two steps forward, with hand outstretched.

"Not Radford, surely?"

The Duke tried vainly to appear at ease.

"That's what they call me now," said Charlie Ross, taking the Duke's daintily gloved hand in his, and crushing it until the little man's eyes watered. "Glad to see you."

The Duke recovered his hand and secreted it behind him.

"I'm sure I'm delighted to see you, my boy—delighted. Your—ah—travels seem to have altered you a little. Ah—I'm almost positive that—I—ah—never would have recognized you. I—ah—I have a photo of you as a lad—a mere lad; but you've changed, my boy—changed very much. Indeed yes, changed."

"I allow I've changed more'n you'd guess," said the temporary Earl of Radford without so much as smiling.

"Good for you!" hissed the real earl, ducking down behind the crowd to howl with irreverent laughter.

"Who is that man?" asked the Duke with the air of one who seeks a confidence and expresses disapproval and condolence in one breath.

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"A distinguished visitor to these parts," said the pseudo-Earl, taking the Duke's arm by the funny-bone and pushing him gently but irresistibly forward. "Come and be introduced to him."

Accustomed all his life to having people introduced to him, the Duke was taken quite a little by surprise; but his funny bone was causing him too much excitement, and the eagle-eyed giant made him feel altogether too much like a little child to enable him to stand on dignity.

The real Earl of Radford swung himself out from behind the crowd, jingling his spurs, and swung a huge felt hat with cavalier-like gallantry.

"Glad to meet you, Duke," he bowed.

Then he held out a hand that was singularly white for a man of his make-up and general appearance. But the Duke had had enough of handshaking for the present, and held his wounded limb behind him—contriving, too, to rub his funny bone secretively.

"THIS here's the Sheriff of Tentown County, in the States," lied Charlie Ross. "He's a friend of mine that I met out there," he added in a belated effort to modify the inaccuracy and save his soul. "He bears my registered trade-mark, and I'm back of the brand for all I'm worth, as the canned-corn fakers have it. Why don't you shake hands with him?"

"Very glad to meet the Sheriff, I'm sure," lied the Duke, eying the red-shirted stranger with evident disfavor and extending him three fingers. "Are you over here for long?" he asked politely.

"Long enough for you to get to know him," interposed the temporary Earl, noticing the other jab at the three fingers and not judging it time for ructions yet. "Come and shake hands with the rest of 'em. This here's the committee of reception. Here's his reverence—sort of second cousin—you'll have heard of him. Shake hands!"

"Oh, how do, Poole?" said the Duke, delighted to see somebody he knew quite well, and forgetting his usual patronizing manner to all parsons, paupers, and poor relations—whom he lumped all together, and classed below poachers in his private memorandum of objectionables. The Reverend George Poole tried hard to seem oblivious of anything unusual or out of place.

For the life of him Charlie Ross could not remember the names of most of the others, but on the other hand he was a man of nerve, and knew how to get away with things. Some he called by their first names, and some by the wrong names altogether, but he introduced the Duke to every one of them, and forced him to shake hands.

Then, inwardly reciting a whole commination service to his patent-leather boots (Sam's boots never did fit him quite, even in the old days when they both wore the highest heels that could be had), he led the way through the station wicket to the waiting string of carriages.

At the mere sight of what was next in store for him the Duke very nearly fainted.

"Feeling poorly?" asked Ross, seizing his funny-bone again and leading him firmly onward.

"No, no, my dear boy—not at all. A little temporary giddiness, that's all—quite well now."

With the full run of the estate, and not a living soul to say him nay, Charlie Ross had given orders to some purpose, and in accordance with his own ideas of how to entertain a Duke.

For the Duke and himself there was a carriage with eight horses, mounted postilions in the Radford livery of canary color and silver braid, and outriders in the Radford Hunt pink. In front there was the village brass band. It was an iniquitously bad band, but it was brazen, and was game to march and bray.

Behind came all the Radford carriages, with four horses to each; and since even that sporting nobleman's stables were limited in their extent, there were all kinds of horses in the shafts, from Shires all the way down to ponies and borrowed farmers' and tradesmen's horses. The Radford carriages in turn were followed by the village turnouts, ending, half a mile away to the rear, with a few hay wagons loaded down with children all aflutter in their Sunday best.

"Let her rip!" said the temporary Earl, standing up in the carriage, and looking back with pride of authorship along the length of the procession.

"Rip she does!" yelled the real owner of the title, springing on to his favorite hunter.

For the occasion the horse was saddled with a Western cinch, and the horn and

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pommel were Western of the West. Out came his two sixshooters, straight above his head into the air.

Ping! Ping! went two revolver shots. The Duke sat bolt upright, trying to adjust his balance to the forward plunge of the frightened horses.

Crash—bang—crash! went the big drum and the cymbals in cacophonic unison; and off went the procession, with the temporary Sheriff's horse whirling and bucking in among it, resenting the unaccustomed gunfire and threatening destruction to the band.

"Is that man likely to fall off?" asked the Duke almost hopefully.

Sam Poole was reloading his revolvers almost unconcernedly, between his horse's frantic bucks.

"Him? Not 'nless the girth gives out! Have a seegar?"

"Thanks, no. They—ah—disagree with me."

"This kind won't. The President of the United States don't smoke a better. Try one!"

The Duke of Blackheath divined, as the weaker of two minds may on suitable occasion, that it would be well to break an otherwise inviolable rule. He took a long black Pomposo and watched it with a jaundiced eye, as if he feared it might go off if he looked away. Charlie Ross bit the end off another one, lit up, and passed the Duke a match.

"What d'ye think of the reception?" he demanded. "Some class to it, what?"

"Er—a little bit—er—unusual, isn't it?"

"You bet it is! Say! Sa—Charlie's feelin' good, ain't he?"

To the accompaniment of a fusillade of shots from both revolvers, the real Earl's horse was plunging in among the bandsmen, scattering them right and left, and doing his best to buck a hole through heaven. Behind, the whole procession was a rousing sea of craned necks—a sea that roared applause.

"REALLY," said the Duke, "I—I think you ought to warn your friend that such goings-on are actually—ah—against the law in this country. He might hurt somebody, you know, to—ah—say nothing of himself. He should be made to—ah—realize that he is not in the—ah—United States, you know."

"Do you suppose," asked the Sheriff a trifle hotly, "that folks carry on that way where—where *he* comes from? Do you suppose Tentown County's full o' lunatics?"

"He—ah— He's—ah— Isn't he—ah—typical?" hazarded the Duke.

"You take it from me," said Charlie Ross, eying the Duke as an eagle eyes a rabbit, but speaking without rancor, "he's livin' up to what he thinks are English notions of a good time. He's having a lark, that's all. Now, me an' you have a sense of dignity—eh, Duke? Afore we're through, me an' you'll show him points, what?"

He nudged the Duke with his elbow, and the little man shifted his seat sideways.

"An excellent suggestion, certainly," he nodded. "Worthy of you—altogether worthy of you. It is our duty to—ah—set a good example—to—ah—people who are unfortunate enough to—ah—lack our breeding. Now—ah—your dear father——"

"Oh, durn him!" interposed the Sheriff. He was deep enough in already, without involving himself in the reported ethics of a mythical papa.

"Well, really!" said the Duke. "Upon my word! If your dear father could have——"

"I said, durn him!" interposed the Sheriff with an eye that counseled caution. "It's my experience—and I've more than some—it's best to let a dead man lie. Don't hold the things he useter say agin him, and don't rub 'em into his relicts. When I said 'durn him' I was putting what I meant to say in language fit for a Duke to listen to. D'ye get me?

"Here we are," he announced, glad to change the subject as Red Shirt wheeled through the old bronze gates and started to career between the elm-tree avenue of Radford Hall.

The quiet old park reëchoed to the brazen clangor of the band. The rooks in the bowing tree-tops cawed astonishment, and the strange procession wound its motley way along the drive while the Duke sat back, trying to forget the quiet dignity of other days when he had visited the father of the present Earl.

"Out ye get, and hurry!" ordered Ross, as they reached the high stone steps. "We'll just have time to cut into the house and have one drink and get our duds on. Bring your glad-rags with you?"

"My—ah—what?"

The Duke was hesitating on the steps. Until he went inside the house, he still

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hugged a visionary hope of making his escape. He was not quite certain that it was not at all a dream.

"Your glad rags—robes. Bring your robes along?"

"My dear boy, I—ah—wouldn't think of it."

"Why not?"

"My dear Radford, the notion is absurd! Upon my soul, you seem to have forgotten a great deal while traveling!"

Charlie Ross, sober as a judge and grim as Fate herself, took his protesting elbow. The steps became all at once nothing to the ducal legs; he almost ran up them, and reached the top before his host. The butler was for showing them into the reception room, but the Sheriff had other ideas. He merely glanced in, to see that all was as he wished it in the room.

"Ply 'em with all the drinks and eats and smokes they want," he told the butler. "His dibs—I mean his Grace and I are going upstairs a minute."

Astonished, but speechless, and unable to protest, the Duke proceeded to comply. At the foot of the broad stairs, though, the man in the red shirt caught up and began to whisper. Charlie Ross turned back to give more orders to the butler, and Red Shirt seized the opportunity to give a little friendly counsel.

"Enjoying it?" he asked. "What's the little game now? Tell me—I'm a friend of his—I've got influence over him."

"Why, he—he wants me to wear robes, and he's taking me upstairs—I can't think what for. I suppose to put some on. I——"

"And you don't want to wear 'em?"

"Why, of course not! My good man, it's unheard of! If it got into the papers, I'd never hear the end of it. They'd think me mad! I'd never dare show my face at my club again; and as for the House, why——"

Sam Poole tapped his forehead.

"Better humor him," he advised. "He's all right until you cross him. Quite safe until you cross him. But cross him if you care to and feel like seeing sport. I'm all for sport myself, and I've crossed him before now. See that?"

Sam Poole bared a scar that he may or may not have acquired in the United States, and the Duke of Blackheath turned three shades paler.

"Here he comes," said Sam. "On the whole, since you're smaller than he is, but—oh, I dunno; suit yourself!"

"Come on," said Ross, reaching for his funny bone again to help him up the stairs. The Duke forestalled him and ran up them two at a time, almost as fast as Ross could follow.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting. Folks won't ever believe you're a real Duke, unless you wear robes."

"Er—I fancy they'd—ah—recognize me," the Duke panted.

NOBODY ever knew exactly what happened upstairs, and Charlie Ross told at least six different versions of it to the same people afterward. It isn't imaginable, and it never had been done before. There neither was nor is the slightest precedent in all the annals of the British aristocracy on which to base a suggestion of what happened in the bedroom.

But ten minutes later the Duke came down the stairs clutching the skirts of a voluminous robe in one hand, holding to the banister rail with the other, and trying hard to balance on his head an Earl's coronet that was too big for him. Serious as Satan, Charlie Ross strode down the stairs behind him.

"Man, they'll none of them understand!" argued the Duke, turning again at the bottom, and offering a last fight for his waning manhood.

"You bet they'll understand!" smiled Ross. "They'll know you and I 'ud do the right thing under any circumstances. Come and have a drink."

"No, no. I never drink. That cigar you gave me——"

"Nonsense. Glass of whisky do you good—give you back your nerve."

He led him, coronet and all, into the reception-room and fed him whisky much as a protecting nurse-girl might have fed a child. He forgot to put in water; so when they started for the carriage the Duke's eyes were poking out like a lobster's, and his face was redder than the red plush of his robe.

"Be sure and humor him!" advised the acting Sheriff in a raucous undertone, mounting beside the carriage, and loosing off his artillery to start the procession moving. "He got chawed by a bear, once, back in the States; he's been awkward ever since!"

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"They'll know which of us two's the Duke, anyhow," said Charlie Ross, as the carriage started. "This ain't right, o' course, and I've no call to go to foundation-layin's dressed like a commoner. My poor pa would ha' fainted at the thought. But then, Dukes have the call over Earls, unless my memory's gone back on me. I sure would hate to steal your thunder, Duke."

"Awfully good of you, I'm sure," said the Duke, who felt himself expected to say something. He was feeling a little bitterly the force of what this stately savage suggested. He could imagine what a ducal figure the other would have cut, and he realized the contrast. Besides, he felt numb to the middle of him with cold funk.

"I—ah—hope there'll be no reporters here?" he hazarded, as the procession once more got under weigh.

"Stacks of 'em!" said Charlie instantly. "Had the boys fetched by telegram, and sent a wagon to meet 'em. They're all primed—all been told to give you a regular write-up!"

The Duke groaned. But his groans were drowned by the clamor of the band and the staccato din of Sam Poole's twin artillery. He took off the coronet and laid it on the seat in front.

"What's the matter?" wondered Ross. "Feelin' poorly? You didn't drink enough o' that whisky."

"My dear man!" said the Duke. He was making a final effort to be firm and to reassert authority. He laid a hand on Ross's knee—a small, lady-like hand that made the Sheriff want to laugh.

"Have you no sense of fitness? Have your—ah—various adventures in—ah—America so—ah—obliterated your memories of the past that you—ah—need teaching again from the beginning?"

"Teaching?" said Ross. "I reckon I've handled this pretty fairly well, so far, and the boys are tickled all to death. They think it's fine!"

The sight of the temporary Earl's face, viewed sidewise hastily, brought back a sudden recollection of Red Shirt's twice-insisted-on advice.

"Not that it isn't extremely well done," he added. "Very well arranged, I might say—details very well thought out, and all that kind of thing. But—ah—just the least bit—ah——"

He was still seeking for an adjective he dared employ when the brass band ceased its dinning, and Sam Poole stopped yelling for a moment. The carriage drew up by an open field where an awning had been raised on poles above a square block of stone. There was almost no crowd near the stone, for the whole village had taken part in the procession.

"Sit quiet, Duke," advised Charlie Ross. "Let 'em all form up around the carriage, and I'll say a few words to 'em. Then you talk, and after that you lay the stone."

He stood up on the seat and raised his hand. He looked like a modernized Red Indian, only greater and deeper-chested, and more conscious of his conquering humanity than any Indian had ever been. The crowd was still the instant that he wished it. Even Sam Poole, the irrepressible, sat still and calmed his sweating horse.

"Boys," said the Sheriff. "Boys and ladies!"

He overdid the Western twang, if anything. It was so unlike the modulated voice with which they usually were addressed that they listened breathless. The Duke shuddered beside and beneath him at each fresh mispronunciation.

"'Tain't every day that a Duke comes here, but when he does come we arrange to do him proud. Here's the Duke. Take a good look at him, and remember him, for he very likely won't come here again!"

By this time the reporters had contrived to force their way through the crowd to the front, and were clustering around with open note-books, scribbling hard.

"Got that down, boys?" asked Ross. "Good. Well, you've seen the Duke, and now you're going to find out why he's here."

The crowd was beginning to titter, but he silenced it again with one swift glance—one sweep, as it were, of a commanding eye. The postilions on the eight horses were looking straight ahead, and there was no sign of a break yet.

"He hasn't contributed a red cent to this here hospital, but that ain't the point. He's here to lay the stone, and have the hospital called after him, and to get the credit for it."

At this point the Duke seized his leg and pinched it violently. Charlie Ross stooped down and the two whispered for a moment.

"He says," continued Ross, "that I'm wrong about the contribution. He says he brought his check book with him, and

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intends to leave a thousand pounds behind."

"Guineas! Make it guineas!" roared the crowd.

There was not a man in it who did not know the Duke's reputation for stinginess. They were almost at the breaking point now, and could not be restrained more than a minute or two longer.

"He makes it guineas!" shouted Ross, holding up one hand for order. "Now, Duke, it's your turn. Make 'em a speech!"

The Duke seemed almost paralyzed. But he got up. Charlie Ross urged him to stand up on the seat, but the little man declined. His hands were trembling slightly, but the Sheriff, eying him like a hawk, detected symptoms of returning manhood and refrained from lifting him.

His rising was the sign for a perfect fusillade from the revolvers, and a more than ever desperate attempt on the unhappy horse's part to get rid of his rider. Cheers burst out from the crowd—cheers mingled with derisive laughter, but confined within the bounds of more or less decency by British respect for hereditary dukedom.

"People!" said the Duke, and the crowd was still. After all, he was used to public speaking, and his voice was trained. They could not help but listen to him. "I came down here to lay this foundation stone, and incidentally to make sure that the Earl, whose friend I was, had a worthy successor."

"Splendid!" roared the crowd. "None better!"

"As you say, he is splendid. The reception he has seen fit to accord me has been worthy of the family traditions, and I don't know which to admire most—his generosity in building you a hospital, his horsemanship, his marksmanship, or his determination to fill the hospital before it is even built!"

"Why, —— him, the little runt's a man!" muttered Charlie Ross beneath his breath, but even his thoughts were drowned by the tumult of the crowd.

"His modesty," the Duke continued, "is in keeping with the rest of his behavior, and I can do nothing but commend his choice of a substitute whose natural dignity has done so much to offset his own boisterous—I might say animal—good spirits."

"Why, durn my hide——"

But Charlie Ross was looking at the rightful Earl, and both of them collapsed. The crowd had scarcely realized the anticlimax yet, and there was silence while the Duke continued—silence, broken by the smothered laughter of Sam Poole, who had hidden his mouth beneath the folds of the blazing handkerchief.

"It is no affair of mine what happens to the thousand pounds—I beg your pardon—guineas. I had had no intention of contributing to your hospital. I have paid the money—I will pay it cheerfully, as the price of the—ah—exhibition I have seen, and for the—ah—opportunity to see how well an Earl of Radford might behave, were the right example set him. I will now lay the foundation stone."

The laying was perfunctory. Not so the cheers. Not so Sam Poole's discomfiture. And not by any means so the handshake that the Sheriff saw fit to impose on his suffering guest. The Duke had won the rubber, and the Sheriff was the first man to admit it.

It was the rightful Earl of Radford who was forced to ride home behind his own postilions, and the Sheriff, with a tall hat on his head, who performed escorting feats of horsemanship. And it was the rightful Earl who presided that night at his own dinner table. He was quiet, for Sam Poole, and somewhat diffident—one might almost say ashamed.

The Sheriff did the talking, and the Sheriff wound up the proceedings about bedtime with what was considered exactly the right sentiment.

"Duke," he said, and the Duke no longer shuddered at the accent or familiarity, "you're a little man, but you're big inside. I was five years tryin' to take a real rise out of our mutual friend Sam, and I couldn't do it—not so's Sam could notice it.

"You've calmed him. You've done what never could be did. You're a better man than I am, and when you come to the States I'll let the whole bunch back there know it."

IT WAS the next day that the Sheriff found how he, too, had been the victim of a "rise." He had overlooked the press, and the reporters, and the privilege of British dukedom. In other words, the Sheriff had got to the press first; but the Duke had stepped in later and adjusted things a little.

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Yesterday [the papers had it] there were great scenes at the laying of the Radford Cottage Hospital Foundation Stone by his Grace the Duke of Blackheath. The hospital is to be built almost entirely from the Earl of Radford's generous contributions, to which the Duke of Blackheath added a thousand guineas before the ceremony.

The event took place before a large crowd, and in all the medieval splendor so long associated with the name of Radford. Nothing was omitted to make it a success—not even the presence of a mounted fool in motley, a part played most successfully for the occasion by a gentleman named Ross, now on a visit from the United States. It was admitted on all hands that Mr. Ross's horse-play was a credit to the land that gave him birth.

"We couldn't do that better in the States," said Charlie Ross, cutting out the clipping, and deciding there and then not to tamper again with the British aristocracy.

The Azoic Law

A Tale of Dawson Days by Samuel Alexander White

Author of "Proof," "The Tump-Line Trust," etc.

"IT'S GOOD going here, and the dogs can stand a stiffer pace than you're putting up, Bassett," shouted Sark from the gee-pole of the sledge he was steering in his comrade's broken trail. "Go to it. Fast as your legs allow. We've a long day's mush before us. For I'm figuring on striking the Takhin River tonight."

"So'm I, pardner," Bassett yelled back. "If them growlin' glaciers don't git us. That's why I slowed. They's sure nothin' innocent to fool with in the dark of any dawn, and comin' on Spring they's always worse. I bin lookin' to bump my nose on the Charpentier one this last half-hour."

"Must be near it now by the way things crackle. Can't you make out the loom of anything, Tom?"

"Nary a loom, Eric. But the feel of the air is some clammy. I— Blazes!"

The exclamation was pitched in sublime astonishment.

Sark heard a grating crunch as of grinding egg-shells and saw Tom Bassett, treading his feet wildly in a vain effort to strike sound footing, sink down to his shoulders in some unseen cavity. And even as he saw, Eric jumped the team to Bassett's side.

Doubling his dog-whip, he cast the loop about his partner's shoulders. With quick flips of his hands, and lifting only one hand at a time from its precarious ice-hold, Bassett passed the loop under his armpits.

Then as Sark braced knees on the sledge and commenced a steady pull, Tom relinquished his ice-holds and seized the loop which encircled him. Like a seal drawn from its breathing-hole, he came out at the end of the tough, twisted walrus-hide whip.

"A crevice, Tom?" asked Eric, as his partner stood up and stamped the water out of his soaked clothes.

"Crevice nothin'! I was in the sea. The water's salt."

"Can't be, partner."

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"Taste it then!" retorted Bassett sharply.

Sark pulled off one of his mittens and in his palm caught some of the drip from Bassett's parka.

"Salt all right," he conceded, licking his tongue through it. "We must be badly out of our course to run off-shore."

"I dunno," shivered Bassett. "But when it gits light I'll know. It'll take till that time for me to dry off. I hate to delay the outfit, Eric, but it's a cast-iron case of have to. Wet and all as I am, I could travel on the level snows through the Spring day that's comin'. But only a fool or a chechako would try it up among glaciers."

"Oh, don't worry over the outfit! There's no use starting to travel till we know where we're traveling. We'll back-trail, Tom, for fire. There was driftwood on some silt we passed not five minutes ago. I had to kick several sticks out of the way of the runners. Come on, you mongrel skeezicks of a lead-dog. Gee her 'round. Gee, I say! Now. Hiyu! Hiyu! Mush!"

WHEN they reached the driftwood, Sark anchored the sledge by turning it on its side and swiftly kindled a fire, while Bassett stripped off his wet garments. Stretching the clothes on sticks close to the leaping flames, Tom crouched down beside them in the radiating heat. Sark, sitting upon the overturned sledge on the other side of the fire, smoked a pipe and watched the mist which heralded the dawn drive by.

Cool, dank, tundra-tainted, it blew, laden with the unmistakable scents of Spring, the smell of ripening mountain-berries, the fragrance of the valley fern. Puffing and swirling, it came, in a motion uncanny, traveling with great velocity yet without the thrust of any visible force behind to impart that velocity. It seemed that, rather than leaping forward under any propulsion, the charging vapor was drawn violently ahead by mammoth suction, rushing unceasingly to fill some interminable void. Still, in reality it was propelled from behind by the gentle respiration of the sleeping giants of glaciers, by the off-shore pouring of the air from the upper ice-fields which, as day advanced and the slumbering glaciers awakened, would swell to roaring, ramping blasts.

"Funny there isn't any sea-wind blowing in to meet it," commented Sark. "By rights, if we're off the coast, we should be in the middle of air-eddies that would lift the scalps from our heads. How do you read that riddle, Tom?"

"I kin't read her," returned Bassett, pulling on his thick underwear which the fierce heat had already dried. "If we're offshore, we should be gittin' the two winds, all right. And if we ain't off-shore, whar would I slip into an air-hole with salt water underneath?"

"We couldn't have swung south and touched the head of Charpentier Inlet, could we?"

"Nit! We camped on the Alaskan-British Columbian boundary last night. Don't you mind we passed one of the survey posts jist before we bivouacked? Well, I laid our course by the stars and the peaks when we started this mornin' to cross Charpentier Glacier at the Glakhik Gorge. I may be a leetle out, Eric, but the Glakhik Gorge is three miles wide, and I'm sure not that far astray. Take it from me, we're somewhar in the valley that rises up to the gorge."

"Then we've made a new scientific discovery," Sark laughed, "striking salt water on land. How do you account for a sea-salt bath in the valley that leads to Glakhik Gorge?"

"I give it up." Tom seized his dry socks and fished in his dunnage bag for an extra pair of shoe-packs. "I dooly and completely give it up. 'Less the sea's had a higher level at some ancient day and sunk and left a hidden reservoir!"

Bassett sat down on the driftwood to pull on his socks, while Sark resumed communion with his pipe.

TOM had but a sock and a half on when the mist dissolved as quickly as it had formed. As if up-thrust by a Titan's hand, the arctic world, bathed in the crimson dawn-light, arose suddenly and stood stark and still before their eyes.

With the abrupt flashing of the light the partners' position was revealed to them. They realized that they were sitting in the middle of an ice-field which choked a strange inlet. South of them, and a mile or two away, the ice-field ended to the leaping assault of silver-backed waves, the bass booming of which had been mistaken for the growling of glaciers. North of them the ice-field extended unbroken to meet a level moraine that marked the shore. And on either hand, except for open channels up

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its sides, it spread to the black rock walls of the inlet.

"You must have steered by the wrong star, Tom," reproached Sark, standing up and staring at their unfamiliar surroundings. "I don't know this inlet at all."

"You don't, eh?" breathed Bassett, a mighty awe in his voice. "It's Charpentier Inlet."

"Charpentier? You're crazy! Charpentier's plugged with a live glacier. There's no harbor and no moraine worth talking about. Here's a good harbor and miles of moraine. Look how far back from the shore-line the wall of the glacier is. You know yourself that the formation of Charpentier isn't anything like this."

"Wasn't!" Bassett corrected. "Look at them mountains." He pointed due east toward a range of snow-clothed peaks lifting their crowning ice-caps five thousand feet in air. "I know 'em as well as I know the warts on my thumb. They mark the Woods Glacier. And, pardner, don't cherish your error a second longer. We stand in Charpentier Inlet. Better'n that, we stand in the newly made Charpentier Harbor. That glacier you see off yonder is the old Charpentier Glacier. It's gone back—retreated."

"Receded."

"Mebbe that's the scientific term, but the movement's all the same. If you'll foller me for ten cracks of a dog-whip, I'll prove it to you."

In the excitement and fascination of his discovery Bassett forgot the small matter of his partial disrobement and turned to strike landward over the ice-field.

"Hold on, Tom," Sark called out, "you've only your underclothes and one sock on. Better go clothed and in your right mind. If it is Charpentier, it'll stay put till we get there. It can't back up any farther."

But Bassett could not wait for his mackinaw, trousers and drill parka to complete the process of drying.

"They kin do it when we camp tonight," he avowed.

He rolled the garments into a wet bundle, threw the bundle on the sledge, and ferreted again inside his dunnage-bag for a fresh set of mackinaws. Within two minutes he was fully dressed and speeding once more ahead of the dog-team. He held crosswise in his hands a strong pole, picked from the pile of driftwood, so that in the possible mischance of hitting another air-hole he could save himself from dropping through.

At the shore-line the ice held fast and sound. They swept from it up on to the level moraine, and with every rod they advanced the proof of Tom Bassett's supposition became more and more apparent. Their way was strewn with the melting remains of huge ice fragments, with glacial cobble, the rubble of crushed granite, and the ooze, slime, drip, and débris that invariably mark the track of receding ice.

"She's done a pretty hike back, Eric," Bassett continually asserted as they encountered each fresh evidence of the glacier's movement. "Talkin' scientifically, Charpentier's sure some receder. You ain't got doubts about it bein' Charpentier now, have you?"

"Not a deserted doubt!" his comrade assured him. "Though I never thought to see the like! I've read of it in books, and I've seen some glaciers that have gone back a piece from the ocean. Still, I never pipe-dreamed anything on a scale like this."

"Nor me!" gloated Bassett. "You was scrupulously right, Eric, in sayin' that we've made a new scientific discovery. No mistake about that. And it's one that'll make the world sit back on its haunches and point its nose to the sky."

IN HIS exultation he pressed forward at a faster rate. The dog-team took his accelerated pace, and shortly the outfit, winding amid ice-alleys, reached the foot of the glacier. From that foot twin streams of milky-blue water foamed away and followed the ragged edges of the moraine. Between spread the monstrous spew of this sick Caliban, driven back from the sea by some mysterious Northland law to lie languishing among the mountain peaks. Its chill breath beat in their faces. Its subterranean growlings and thunderings deafened their ears.

Now and then a deep wrinkle ridged its aged face, and an ice fragment as big as a church chipped off to splash in either stream or crash like a bursting shell upon the stony head of the moraine.

"Lord!" sighed Bassett, reverently. "Thar's force for you. And jist think of the millions of tons of ice that used to stand where we're standin' now."

"Oh, it's a miracle on earth, all right!" Sark conceded. "A man could stand and

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look at it for a dozen years. But looking won't get us anywhere. The Takhin River's our way-station. We'd better be making it. How do you figure we'll cross Charpentier now? Where's the Glakhik Gorge in this new arrangement?"

"The Glakhik Gorge?" Bassett wheeled and pointed out over the inlet. "Right whar we built our fire, Eric. You kin still see the smoke. Well, if you go down under that ice shell and on down under various fathoms of water, you'll find the shattered remains of Glakhik Gorge. Don't you see that the coast formation's all changed? The sea's come back on the heels of the glacier till the steep of the moraine stopped it."

"Then there isn't any Glakhik Gorge any more. And you did run a true course, Tom. I sure apologize for that starry reference of mine. But since there isn't any Glakhik, we'll have to discover a new pass through. So let's begin the hunt."

"No, not yet. We got bigger business here."

"What's the matter, partner?" demanded Sark, a little irritated. "Too many ices gone to your head? There's another thing I've heard: that glaciers get a man. But I always calculated the man had to be widely cracked first. I thought better of you, Tom, and I warn you out straight that I'm not going to fool any longer 'round these skating-rinks, supposing they are as big as Switzerland."

"I ain't interested in the skatin'-rinks either," disavowed Bassett. "It's the water that's got me, and the moraine. Do you know what territory's under your moccasins, Eric?"

"Alaska. The Panhandle."

"Not accordin' to my figurin'."

"What then?"

"Canada!"

Sark jumped, as if the probable Canadian soil had burned his soles. He stared at the moraine, apparently striving to penetrate with his keen vision its impassive face and discern its nationality.

"By thunder, partner, you're shrewd as the devil himself!" he finally burst out. "I'd have never thought of that. If it is, if you're right——"

"We're multi-millionaires," Bassett concluded for him. "They's practically no limit to the value of a Canadian harbor through the Alaskan Panhandle for the north end of British Columbia. I kin pretty near take my oath and say that's what the Charpentier Glacier's gone and made.

"Both the glacier and the head of the inlet used to be in Alaskan territory, and not worth a tinkerin' thought as an Alaskan harbor, because she has thousands of 'em, and better ones at that, without live glaciers in the way. But as a Canadian harbor whar thar wasn't a single outlet—say, Eric, it opens a new era and a mint of money. I certainly kin't eat till I confirm things, till I fix the Alaskan boundary out thar in the water. I'm goin' to cut our back-trail and do it. It won't take me long. But if I ain't here by the time you've cooked dinner, you go ahead and eat. I'm livin' on air for the present."

BASSETT did not follow the back-trail over the inlet. At the base of the glacier he crossed on an ice-bridge the stream which poured out from its cavernous bowels. Surmounting an outcrop of dripping rock, he angled off for the land-trail he and Sark had made that morning. He cut it where he desired, close to their last night's camp.

He knew the trail at that point ran with the boundary-line. Sighting over it, as through a transit, he lined it up with a conspicuous cliff upon the shore of Charpentier Inlet. Then, using his compass, he ran the line carefully and persistently. The compass line took him south of his old trail, and he came out on open water at the edge of the inlet, below where the ice-field ceased.

In high triumph Bassett marked the spot where, approximately, the Alaskan boundary bridged the water gap, and tramped on up the inlet in the old sledge trail. The dark came down before he had crossed the moraine, but Sark's fire gleamed like a crimson star to guide his feet.

"Where is it, Tom?" Eric yelled anxiously into the gloom as he heard his partner's feet rattle upon the ice and stones. "Where'd you place it?"

"Jist whar I said," answered Bassett. "Out in the water. We'll have to use a surveyor to locate it exactly. But she's thar, somewhar, past the ice-field. Anybody kin guess it with the naked eye, but I ran her by compass, Eric, just to prevent mistakes. And compasses don't lie."

"Whoopee!" exulted Sark. He settled the frying-pan on the coals with a reckless

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bang that scattered a shower of sparks and nearly capsized the bacon.

"Here, don't do that," his comrade implored. "I'm plumb famished. Dish it out. I don't care whether it's done or not. Dish it out and put on another panful. I've run more miles than they's hours in the day, and I've a hole in me the size of them ice chunks we saw fall off the glacier."

Ravenously Bassett attacked two meals in one, and while he ate he interpreted the visions that rose before his prophetic eyes.

"Finest harbor in the North, Eric!" he boasted modestly. "Land-locked and deep. No fall in Summer. No storms in Winter. I kin see the long piers and the docks stickin' out now. They'll beat any ordinary ice-field, and if it gets real bad, why, a good ice-breaker 'll make chiclet chips of it. And look at this moraine for a town-site! Could a man wish for any finer? We'll stake it in the mornin', and we'll hold it in our own right and gather the fruits thereof. Do you get me?"

"I get you," Sark assured him. "I've seen you ride many a hunch, Tom, and ride well. But if ever you straddled a hide-bound hunch, you've straddled it now. You're going strong, and the road rings right. I can't see anything else but the winning-post for yours."

"Charpentier we'll name our town-site," breathed Bassett, tenderly. "Thar's magic in yon term, pardner. And it's sure a noble transaction to graft people and peace and prosperity on to a desert of ice and snow. Think of it! The pæan of human industry and endeavor ringin' out through the primeval silence across them inviolate snows! The town-site of Charpentier! I kin see it buildin' all 'round me in the dark, Eric. Streets and churches and homes; saloons and stores and sawmills; restaurants and Chinese laundries and Y. M. C. A.'s."

"That's good to think of, Tom. That's fine. You sure have the poetic pulse, and your soul is the soul of a seer. And the hand of Providence must have had a finger in it. Else why did we back up on the Kluane gold-field proposition in the face of fair prospects?"

"You're speakin' gospel now, pardner. The same truth holds on the route we took. What made me haul you down to the mouth of the Alsek River agin your will and acrost this way instead of goin' out by the Dalton Trail?"

"There's only one answer—Providence! And the district we came out of is the district that'll benefit by this harbor."

"It misdoubtedly is. Why, the Kluane district's only been scratched yet, and the rest is nearly virgin wild. Jist wait till we git Charpentier boomin' and a railroad pushed in by the Tatshenshini River to the Dezadeash country and through the Shakwak Valley. Say, Eric, you gotta promise me you'll cinch a pack-lashin' on my legs before I turn in tonight, or I'll be stalkin' about stakin' this moraine in my sleep and fall off and break my nervous neck. Promise me! For I simply kin't run the chance of accidents before my dream comes true!"

Sark promised, and Bassett slept in peace.

AS SOON as it was light, both men were abroad with axes and stakes. That day they staked the whole moraine from stream to stream. The next few days they spent back in the mountains, prospecting the passes for the best possible route to the Tatshenshini.

They found one to their liking, and in the course of their search they also stumbled unaware upon the cause of the glacier's backward movement. There they beheld the parallel gulches which split the lofty plateau lying between the peaks choked by immense rock-slides from the crest of the coast range. These gulches had been the beds of ice-rivers which fed the Charpentier Glacier, and the stupendous force of the ice-trains moving toward the sea had burst through the first slides, carrying down with them the major portion of the rock and casting the rest high upon the sides of the gulches like the débris of a broken dam.

Yet the repeated slides that followed, approaching a mountain in size and solidity, had defeated the stubborn ice-trains, walled up the gulches, and dammed back the ice-flow in an immense sea, the overflow of which overran the plateau and passed down the northern slope of the range to melt and feed unnamed streams in the desolate country leading to the Takhin River.

"It's simple when you know how, Eric," observed Bassett, as they stared, wonder-eyed, at this nature marvel. "A glacier is jist a lake—a lake of ice. When you shut off her ice-river, she goes dry."

"Yes," nodded Sark thoughtfully, "it's simple. So simple, Tom, that we won't publish this part of our find. We got to

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raise capital behind us, and it might make investors nervous. For some of them with scientific minds might begin to figure what would happen if there should be a reversion to original conditions upon the plateau. There's no danger of that, but panicky people can't be convinced. So don't uncover this, partner. Just keep it dark."

With this fixed resolve Sark and Bassett returned to their town-site. As they descended from the shoulders of the mountains on to the moraine at noon of a warm, sunny day, Bassett, who was ahead, stopped suddenly, felt the sodden Spring snow in front of him, and exploded into crisp, crackling phrases.

"What's the matter?" demanded his comrade.

"Matter? Intervention. A sled-trail. Fresh. Somebody's bin on our town-site."

He leaped up and broke into a run, instinctively heading for the nearest stake.

Sark saw him bend down to read the inscription on the stake, arise in a mighty wrath, pluck the stake out, and hurl it violently into space.

"What's got you, Tom?" he asked in astonishment, as Bassett sprinted back toward him.

"Casino Charlie!" roared Bassett. "He's got us both!"

"Casino Charlie? But Casino can't be within hundreds of miles of here. We left him in the Kluane stampede. Last I saw of him was up on Kluane Lake."

"He's follered us out," declared Tom heatedly. "Thought we had somethin' better under cover when we backed up on Kluane, and shadowed us. And now he's blundered on our townsite. He'll make a cold steal of it if we don't git him. Wheel them dogs around, Eric. We'll ride and run by spells. I'll take the first whack. You lie low on that sledge and breathe deep and rest yourself the best you know how. Now mush, you long, lean malemutes! Mush!"

BASSETT'S whip cracked like a pistol shot, and the team went off with a rush over the moraine. What precise start Casino Charlie had they did not know. But they had the advantage of his broken trail. Day and night their rush continued across the high mountain plateau, down the northern slope, down the Takhin River, across the head of Chilcoot Inlet, across the Ferebee River and on to Dyea Inlet.

As they swung up the shore south of Mount Newell, they glimpsed a big ocean steamer plowing down the inlet, bound out of Skagway on the farther shore. Nearer at hand a Chilcat Indian in a canoe bobbed like a cork upon the waves. Many of his brethren from their camp on the beach stood at the waterline, jabbering to him in strange dialect, and many more Chilcats, bucks, squaws and children, crowded about some center of interest within the circle of tepees.

Casino's sled-trail led through the camp, but Bassett, supposing he had only made a short stop there, swerved by so as not to lose time in coming to a halt.

"Hey, you Chilcats!" he yelled as he passed. "White mans, Casino mans, run um-sled track! Um stop long here?"

But then, before any one could answer, as through the palings of a fence one flashes by, through the ranks of the Chilcats he saw Casino Charlie, knife in hand, bending over his exhausted team and cutting the blown dogs out of the snarled, patched traces.

"You ornery spawn of a sneak!" Tom howled back, shaking his dog-whip ominously. "Jist wait till we git that town-site filed. Then we'll come lookin' for you."

"He hasn't forgotten that trimming we gave him in the transportation game up on Chilcoot Pass," remarked Sark, as they rocked onward up the Inlet. "I don't think he'll ever forget."

"No, and if he comes buttin' into our plans agin, he'll git somethin' else he'll never forgit!" prophesied Bassett grimly.

By mid-afternoon the partners reached Dyea. There they paused only long enough to eat a huge meal and see that their worn malemutes were cared for. Then they set out for Dawson City. The snows on Chilcoot from Sheep Camp up were very soft, and the ice-trails on the lakes and rivers beyond were rotting to slush, yet they made Whitehorse before the flood went out and thence traveled on the first steamer to Dawson.

IN DAWSON the preliminary file of the new townsite called Charpentier was attended to at once. Sark and Bassett took the trouble to see that the filing, as far as territorial jurisdiction went, was air-tight and indisputable. Territorially,

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the town of Charpentier was theirs. Skeleton plans of their intended developments and the rough survey Bassett had run would be sent on to Ottawa from Dawson, and it needed only the arrival of the documents from the capital to confirm them in possession.

But knowing that the Department of Lands was notoriously slow where the northern territory was concerned, the partners did not propose to waste the precious Summer in waiting on their title. On the strength of their own assurance and the assurance of the Commissioner of the Yukon that everything would be all right, they started in to develop their new-born town.

They drew upon the stout bank account they had piled up in Dawson, turned all their creek holdings into ready money, and, backed by additional funds advanced by Klondike capitalists, chartered a fleet of coast steamers, packed the steamers' holds with monstrous and heterogeneous cargoes, and sailed away. They went out of Dyea Inlet down the Lynn Canal, passed through Icy Strait, and swung north into Glacier Bay.

Spring had merged into Summer, and the waters of the bay were shimmering silver, flecked here and there with the ghostly white of an ocean-drifting berg. Like a jeweled left hand the sparkling sheet of water stretched into the land. Muir Inlet was the thumb of the resplendent hand, and the fingers were the more attenuated reaches of the thousand indentations which marked the debouchment of some glacial flow. Of these Charpentier Inlet was the middle finger, long, bold, symmetrical, and it seemed symbolical that it should have been chosen as the seat of power and of prestige.

Its shores, mountain-walled on either hand, were fringed with the dark-green spruce. Here and there the green split with the sapphire flash of a stream or the amethyst blaze of a glacier. Delicate veils of mist, nebulous, rainbow-hued, wreathed the moss-grown tundras. Night and day the songs of shore and forest birds pulsed from the earth, and overhead great phalanxes of wild fowl flung their bugle-calls across the sky.

Night and day the sun shone fiercely, carpeting the bare sheep-meadows of the ranges with wild grasses, shrouding bald ridge and bench ground with new shrubbery, and painting league-long sunny slopes with the flame of flower and berry. It was the middle of June, and not till the middle of July would darkness descend again. The magic wand of the exotic northern Summer was waving in a wizard hand. In the wake of its waving, miracle overran miracle, and the face of the Arctic land was wrapped in wonder, mystery, and glamour.

Into this atmosphere of wonder, mystery, and glamour landed Sark's and Bassett's fleet, and, in the days that followed, the growth of their enterprise was as the growth of flower and fern about them. As a mushroom rises in the rain of a night, so rose Charpentier with its piers, docks, and steamers; with its freight sidings, engines, and cars; its people, peace, and prosperity; streets, churches, and homes; saloons, stores, and sawmills; restaurants, laundries, and Y. M. C. A.'s. Before two months had passed, Charpentier was on the map! Its fame had gone abroad, and scientists came up to view the wonders wrought in the track of a receding glacier.

Great projects were under way, among them the building of the railroad inland to the Tatshenshini to open up the Dezadeash and Shakwak country, and the installation of an electric power-plant in the western stream which flowed from the Charpentier Glacier down along the edge of the moraine. And this last, of all the miracles performed in and around the new-born town, appeared to the townspeople the most wonderful. They doted on that power-plant, and they longed and fretted for the night when under those far northern skies the bulbs which lined Charpentier's streets should leap into fiery brilliance. Against that time they made preparations for a giant celebration.

IT WAS the end of August, and daylight and dark were once again differentiated before the power was ready to switch on, so the townspeople had sufficient leisure to mature their plans. They matured them well, and by the same token they matured a surprise for Tom Bassett. On the momentous evening a score of picked men went out to him where he hovered with Eric Sark and Elmperd, the electrician, about the power-house on the western stream.

"Come on, Tom," they commanded. "You been out here all day. The town's going on a tear tonight, and the boys want you along."

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"I kin't," protested Bassett. "I gotta help Elmperd tinker with this dynamo. They's all expectin' the lights to flick on at dark, and I sure wouldn't like to see them disappointed. Take Sark, there."

"We're taking Sark, all right. But we want you too, Tom. Elmperd can do without you. Hurry up!"

"No, no, I gotta stay! Elmperd's some high-class electrician, but he kin't do three or four men's work. I gotta stay and help him."

Yet his importuners were not to be denied. They assailed him in a body, bundled him into a dump-cart along with the laughing and willing Sark, and, hitching themselves to the cart, trundled him across the moraine to the outskirts of the town. There the cart was met by the newly organized town band, and Tom Bassett began to scent something erratic.

"What's this mean, Eric?" he demanded anxiously. "Light? Or me?"

"I don't know," snickered Sark, who had had a secret hand in the preparations. "You better wait a while and see. I guess the boys are going to celebrate."

"Then I'm goin' to jump," resolved Bassett desperately. "I know what they's after. Homage and all that! I've seen them symptoms before."

"Don't!" advised Sark. "You'll break a leg on those stones. And you can't get away anyway. They'll throw you back into the cart. Sit still and enjoy the ride."

Perforce Bassett sat still, but there was no joy in his heart, and his was a dolorous mien as, headed by the trumpeting band, the procession paraded through Charpentier's main street. The street, he observed, was gaudily decorated, flaunting flags and bunting and streamers. People went about with laughs and shouts, hugging armfuls of fireworks, and momentarily the mob about the wheels of his chariot increased.

In state that befitted an uncrowned king, he was escorted down to the water-front, where rose a ponderous platform of planks. On to this platform, along with Sark and other leading citizens and the town band, Bassett was gently heaved. The whole population crowded around the four sides of the platform, and Tom, gazing down upon the sea of faces, felt the first quakes of stage-fright. Seated on his left hand was Burl Endicott, dealer in northern supplies, on his right Morran Sutin, contractor in general for Charpentier's many undertakings. Both men were heavy in authority and bore the pointed respect of the populace, and it therefore seemed very fitting that Burl Endicott should arise and cry the clamorous crowd to order.

"Ladies and gentlemen and children of Charpentier," he spoke up, when comparative quiet obtained, "I feel it a red-hot honor that by unanimous consent I should have been chosen chairman of this impromptu gathering!"

"Impromptu!" groaned Bassett to Sark. "The hide-bound hypocrite. It was done deliberately by design with malicious intent. I'm goin' to faint any minute."

"I want to assure you that no one in this town has the town's interest more at heart. I've watched it grow, and I've grown with it. My hopes and my finances are implanted here. I rejoice with you, one and all, in the progress Charpentier's made, and I feel that this little celebration planned to welcome the coming of electric energy through our streets and homes has a twofold significance. You know, friends, that a town never feels full-fledged with the shell kicked to smatterings until it has light and—a mayor.

"And so with the coming of the light I should be glad as chairman to receive nominations for Mayor of Charpentier. Now, remember, I'm not trying to impose my own opinions. That's the way I feel about it, and I simply extend the suggestion. Whether to act upon it or not rests entirely with yourselves. But to test public sentiment here in a decisive manner, let us put the matter to a tentative vote. All in favor of selecting a mayor at this moment let out a yell!"

The roar from the Charpentier citizens came like a cannonade.

"Carried!" announced Burl Endicott. "I shall now declare the nominations for mayor open."

Tom Bassett was half out of his seat before Sark could catch him by the shoulder.

"I nominate," he blurted, in a painful attempt to stave off the inevitable, "I nominate Morran Su——"

"Sit down!" thundered Sark, drowning his voice and crushing him into his chair.

And Morran Sutin leaped up.

"I nominate Tom Bassett."

"Seconded!" cried Kirke Fonsley, from the seat beside Sutin.

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"Tom Bassett for mayor!" proclaimed the chairman. "Moved by Morran Sutin, seconded by Kirke Fonsley. Any other nominations?"

"None!" boomed the crowd.

"Carried unanimously! Tom Bassett, I have the honor of registering your name as first Mayor of Charpentier. I shall now vacate my chair and install you therein. The people are waiting for you to address them. After which you will have the pleasure of pressing this button on the platform to switch on Charpentier's lights."

AS ENDICOTT led the helpless Bassett forward, a steamer's siren blew in the harbor, and they could see her lights streaking in through the gloom to the docks.

"A boat!" spluttered Tom, thinking to create a diversion. "Must be the *Queen Charlotte Island* with the railroad steel aboard. We jist gotta go and look arter the unloadin', Burl."

"No, no," smiled Burl. "That's the *Skagway*, and she hasn't an ounce of steel in her hold. You fire ahead. The crowd's waiting."

Impatience was beginning to manifest itself. There were cries of "Speech! Speech!"

So Bassett stood up before the throng, blinking his eyes to the roars of acclamation that resounded. As he gazed on the happy faces, he felt the thrill of the dreamer who sees his dream achieved, and before he knew it, his native eloquence flamed forth.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he bellowed, "I'm sure no politician or parliamentarian. I know bloody leetle about mayoralties and principalities. But I know how proud you are of Charpentier, and I kin realize how great is the honor you have chucked upon me. I'm a modest man. I tell you straight that I'd sooner see Burl Endicott, Morran Sutin, or somebody else shoulder the job. But I ain't yeller enough to back down arter you've gone and dooly appointed me. So I hereby and with heavy heart accept that appointment.

"Take sufficient warnin' that I intend to exercise my authority to the limit and accordin' to my lights. As Mayor of Charpentier I shall maintain strict law and order among you, put the fear of God into you, and collect your taxes to the last lone cent. And as Mayor of Charpentier the first task to my hand is one as I fulfil with eagerness and ex-tak-see. Ladies and gentlemen and leetle children, as is your abode at this moment so may your abode be all through life, and at the end of life, filled with laughter, happiness, and—light!"

Bassett touched the button, and from end to end of Charpentier, in street and home, in business place and public building, the white radiance of electric energy flashed out. A ring of glowing bulbs starred the platform whereon he stood, and below him on the water-front big one-hundred-candle-power lamps glared upon the docks and upon the steamer *Skagway* throwing out her lines.

A terrific cheer rocked the throng and the band struck up, but Tom Bassett did not hear. All the powers of his other senses seemed concentrated in his eyes.

He was staring fixedly at the face of Casino Charlie and at the faces of many of Dawson City's Mounted Police behind Casino Charlie, all moving down the *Skagway's* gangplank and up the wharf toward his platform. It was as much the sneering smile of triumph upon Casino's face as the businesslike manner in which Captain Constantine stalked at the head of the detachment that awoke in Bassett a premonition of disaster.

AT THE foot of the steps leading onto the platform the detachment halted.

"What's all this?" demanded Constantine, ascending the steps. "Band concert? Who's in authority here?"

"I am," answered Bassett. "I jist been appointed Mayor of Charpentier."

"Thunder! I'm sorry, Tom." Constantine put a hand upon Bassett's arm as if to steady him against a coming blow, and presented him with a long, slim document. "I have to dispossess you of your townsite. Here's the notice of dispossession. Previous location, it seems."

"Previous location!" Bassett glared dumfounded at the captain.

"Yes. Casino Charlie found it first. At least, the Department of Lands received his statement of discovery and application for title first. They had granted him possession before your papers came in."

"But look here!" blazed Sark, shouldering in. "The commissioner told us to go ahead. He pledged his word that everything would be all right."

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"I can't help that, Sark," returned Constantine firmly. "I said I was sorry. While acting officially, I can't say more than that. Many men have made the same mistake you've made, relying on the Dawson end, only to have decisions reversed at Ottawa."

"But you can't turn us out now. We've invested a quarter of a million dollars here. We own the whole thing. We've built everything and financed everything. We've rented the houses and outfitted the stores. We're paying the postmaster's and the pastor's salaries. People are eating and sleeping and existing under our leases, and they'll back us to the very last turn."

"You're right, Eric," chimed in Burl Endicott and Morran Sutin. "We'll back you. Every man here'll back you."

"It doesn't matter if the whole Dominion backs you," stated Constantine, eying Endicott and Sutin coldly. "Law is law, Sark, and it's got to be enforced. Casino Charlie, of course, expected kicking. That's why we're here. That's why he got a ruling of the courts on the matter. The ruling's in that document. It's wound up in a lot of luxurious language, but the bald sense of it is that Casino is bound to take over your townsite at cost, and that you are bound to vacate within fourteen days. So don't be foolish enough to raise any racket. You can't get over that document. It's ironbound. And I don't have to tell you that the Mounted Police never fell down on a job they undertook."

"But Casino Charlie couldn't 'a beaten us to it," argued Bassett. "Everybody knows the story of how he tried to, but the fact remains that he didn't. Thar was no Yukon mail out, anyway, till arter the Spring break-up. Our papers went in the first out-mail."

"Yes, you measly offspring of a skunk, you have a friend in the land office!" Sark shouted down over the platform edge at Casino. "That's mighty plain. Together you've framed up a dirty, crooked, smelly deal!"

"No fear!" denied Casino. From his safe vantage-ground in the midst of the Mounted Police he leeringly flaunted much documentary evidence embellished with red seals. "It's all fair and clean and above the belt. If you don't believe me, go to Ottawa and look at the records. They don't lie. You needn't think you and Tom Bassett own the whole continent. This harbor and townsite was open to the day and all comers. Him with the best legs took it, and I was it."

"You lie! We beat you in fair run, but you've pulled off some condemned underhand trick."

"Not on your life! I had my papers ready before the run, and I trimmed you bad."

"How?"

"Oh, you can figure on that all Winter!" grinned Casino. "You'll have nothing else to do."

"By thunder, Eric, I know!" Bassett broke in with a flash of intuition. "Remember whar we passed him in the Chilcat camp on the shore of Dyea Inlet? Remember the Chilcat's canoe out in the inlet and the steamer *Puget Sound* bound down? That's how he got his papers out before ours."

"The cursed Siwash!" roared Sark. He put hands upon the platform railing and vaulted straight down upon Casino. But Casino was well within the police phalanx, and many hands caught Sark in mid-air and tossed him out into the crowd.

Tom Bassett, Burl Endicott, Morran Sutin, the bandsmen, and the others on the platform dived after Sark and loyally supported him. The crowd surged about the Mounted Police, and inside three seconds pandemonium raged on the water-front.

Casino himself was careful to keep in the center of the police detachment, which swayed and swung as it met and repulsed repeated fistic assaults, but Ante Baker, Gunboat Kane, and many more of Casino's friends, come up with him on the *Skagway* to share in the spoils, were caught outside the protecting ring. Upon these fell the brunt of the battle, but they gave battle as lustily as they received, and up and down the water-front, stampeding back and forth, now jammed against the quaking platform, now reeling along the very edge of the docks above the black water, the fight for the glory and possession of Charpentier went on.

Black eyes and skinned noses were bestowed with lavish hands. Men lost hats, coats, collars, and shirts, not to speak of divers portions of their anatomies. The instruments of the bandsmen were beaten flat over defiant heads, and valorous spirits began to break up the planks of the platform for more deadly batons.

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IT WAS this last grim turn of affairs that decided Captain Constantine to spring his *coup*.

Upon the platform were piled the big bundles of fireworks intended to close the celebration, and Constantine stooped, gathered them up, and hurled them over the railing into the midst of his detachment.

"Shoot!" he commanded with a grin. "They'll do the work just as well as Colts."

Whereupon, with glowing cigarettes stuck handily in their mouths, his men abruptly opened a terrific bombardment. Showers of giant firecrackers exploded over the heads of the mob. Whizzing rockets swathed gaps in their ranks. Roman candles spat like Gatlings into startled faces. And vicious pinwheels buzzed like monstrous fiery hornets in men's beards and hair. What a moment before had been a determined charge, turned to an ignominious rout. Under the daunting stream of fire the throng broke and scattered, rubbing their burns and tearing off ignited garments as they ran.

"That's only fireworks!" laughed Constantine, when the noise had somewhat quieted down. "Take a hint in time. I wouldn't advise you to provoke my men into throwing lead. For, mark me, they'll throw it a lot faster than pinwheels and crackers. Tom Bassett, come up here like a sensible man and order this crowd off before it gets hurt. Come up on the platform. And you, Sark, come with him."

Bassett released two of Casino's friends whom he still held in a tender embrace, wiped the blood from his nose, and ascended the steps. Sark heaved up his gigantic bulk off three more Casinoites upon whom he had been sitting and followed his partner. He blew upon a set of badly bruised knuckles as he came, but on his face was the happy glow of one who fulfils his duty to the ultimate end.

"Don't buck under," he whispered at the back of Bassett's neck. "We got them going now. Another rush and we'll sure drive them into the harbor."

"No, Eric, another rush won't do," counseled Tom. "They'll flash their guns, and we ain't goin' to have the murder of innocent citizens on our hands. We've got the good-will of the town all right, and it would go the limit for us. But we kin't shove them up as sacrifices. You know Constantine. He's a man of his word. And it ain't all word. He's always got the deed up his sleeve. We kin't crowd him any harder."

Bassett walked across what was left of the platform and faced the scattered people.

"Boys, I must respectfully request you to dissolve to your homes. I thank you for your efforts in my behalf, but I see that we're up aginst too stiff a game. Accordin' to law Casino Charlie's in possession here. Accordin' to the rulin' of the courts on this mix-up, we gotta vacate within two weeks and give him the town at cost, jist as it stands. It sits sour on our stomachs to do it, but you know Sark and me always bin law-abidin' men. As Captain Constantine says, law is law. You kin't buck the law and git away with it. It'll git you in the end.

"So Sark and me bow with thunderin' bad grace to the superior decree. We step out and let Casino Charlie top the throne. My only hope is that he handles it well and that you have as much peace and prosperity under the new ree-jime as you had under the old. Now, of course, on the face of things it ain't possible for me to hold the office which you have so kindly give me. An hour ago I hated like blazes to have that office shoved on me, but at this present moment I don't mind confessin' that I hate worse'n blazes to have it taken away.

"I've bin your mayor for sixty minnits, and in them sixty minnits I've got closer to you than most mayors git to their townsfolk in sixty years. So I say agin that it is with rank regret I am forced to pass up the opportunity of servin' you and to resign my sixty-minnit mayoralty!"

DESULTORY cheering and hand-clapping broke from the scattered remnants of the mob as Bassett, in company with Sark, descended and, walking in dejected fashion, passed up Charpentier's main street.

But this dejection held only till the partners were out of sight of the water-front. Then Bassett was transformed into a human dynamo of energy. He seized Eric's arm and started a hot sprint for their cabin.

"Leg it, leg it faster and faster, Eric!" he urged. "We'll git some more clothes to cover our bare spots, and then thar's work for us to do. No sleep tonight!"

"Why? What's up now? Didn't you buck under when I told you not to. Didn't you resign?"

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"Resign! That was only bluff. Bluff for Casino. I've only opened the campaign, and he'll bloody soon know I'm on the war-path. A great game of his, ain't it? To let us float and finance and pioneer everythin'! He sat back till he was sure that the business was sound and stable and ready to double-quintuple the capital invested. Then he steps in and takes it over at cost. Cost! As if cost was a patch aginst the dividends a-comin'! As if cost represented the days and nights and gray matter and hopes and pride we jammed into it! Thunderation, jist wait till I git at him!"

"What you going to do? You know Constantine——"

"Constantine! Constantine be sunk in Glacier Bay! He ain't comin' in at all on this stunt. Constantine and his leetle law ain't bubbles on the brink of my momentous enterprise. I'm goin' to invoke the azoic law, Eric. Casino, the hound, banks on reversion. Well, we'll give him reversion in all its primal essence. We'll bust him and his stolen town-site, as some poetic gink has said, at one hell swoop."

"Fell swoop!"

"I'm sure he meant the other. And that's the kind of swoop that's goin' to hit Casino. Whar's my khaki shirt, Eric? Whar in tarnation is my khaki shirt?"

"I used it for a dish-cloth yesterday. It's hanging there on the window-sill."

"You fiend! A wet and smelly mess! So I'll jist confiscate your new blue sweater to hide my nakedness. Thar, I'm ready now. Come on. We gotta marshal our forces for a warfare aginst Nature. We'll need Tagish Jim and his Chilcats off the railroad and Henriks the rock man. And they's drills and dynamite cases and other sundries to load!"

AT TWO o'clock that night a work train pulled out over the temporary track that crowned the roadbed which had already been graded for many miles inland toward the Tatshenshini River. In it were flat-cars of Chilcat Indians, supplies, grub, and tools. On the last flat-car sat Tom Bassett, Eric Sark, Henriks, and Tagish Jim. By the flare of oily waste burning in an old pan the three white men drew strange plans on paper and talked in such terms as incline, gradient, and center of gravity.

Tagish Jim, sitting back watching them, pulled stolidly at his pipe. He could not understand their scientific terms, but he saw that on the paper they had sketched part of the high plateau lying among the mountain-peaks. He knew the gulches there, and he also knew the rock-slides that had lately filled them. These appeared to be the center of interest. He began to realize that some weighty undertaking with regard to them was the reason of their journey out of Charpentier in the middle of the night when all the rest of its citizens were in bed and only a handful of Constantine's privates patrolled its streets. And when he saw Bassett fold up the paper plans and sum up all the intricate calculations in plain, terse phrases, he was much wiser and felt that he had grasped the portent of those plans.

"We'll take the central gulch," Tom generalized. "It's shorter drive. It's deeper. It'll carry more ice and do the job quicker. Also, it'll be easier to block agin from above when we want the power shut off. Yes, it's the central gulch, boys, and tunnel straight through. And, Henriks, I'll drink the German blood of you if it ain't finished within two weeks!"

He turned to Tagish Jim.

"Tagish, you hear? Tunnel. Two weeks. Savvy?"

"Savvy sure," nodded Tagish Jim.

"All right. I want you boss um men. Work double shift. Night and day. No let up. You boss um hard. Work um like blim-blammed blazes!"

"Sure. Tagish Jim work um like blim-blammed blazes. No smoke. No swear. No even spit. Um stop to spit, me sack um sure."

For Tagish Jim was a very wise Indian, and in his wisdom of the moment he transcended the superior breed of whites which thronged the town of Charpentier. These knew at dawn that Tom Bassett and Eric Sark had dropped out of sight, but they did not know the partners' project or destination. Rumor had it that they had sunk too much money in townsite improvements with nothing material to show for it to be reimbursed by Casino's taking over of the place at cost. Therefore they had gone out in the hills to chase a placer that they knew of and unearth a sum that would cause Casino to stand and deliver.

But nothing was certain, and Casino did not trouble his head about their absence. It made no difference to him. If they were

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not here before the expiration of the fourteen-day limit the courts had set, it was their own affair and their own loss. Beyond that time he was not bound by law to allow them any indemnity. If their claim stood unsettled then, the town would be confiscated bodily by him.

And during those fourteen days, accompanied by legal advisers he had brought up from Skagway, Casino went about with Lawyer Lange, the attorney of Sark and Bassett, and in whose hands they had left all the details of winding up, confirming the valuation the partners had placed upon their townsite holdings. That valuation ran precisely to one-quarter million dollars.

Casino and his lawyers haggled over the total, endeavoring to pare it down to two hundred thousand, but Lange was firm in his clients' interests, and Casino finally gave in. For he secretly hoped that in the end he would be compelled to pay nothing, that the failure of Sark and Bassett to appear and settle within the prescribed time would forfeit their indemnity. As the end approached, it seemed that he had every chance of realizing his hopes.

At half-past eleven o'clock on the fourteenth night he sat in Lange's office awaiting final settlement. At twelve o'clock the time limit expired, and gloatingly he watched the hands of the clock move round. As the mechanism whirred before the strike, Casino stood up and lit a cigar with a satisfied grunt.

"I guess you can run a blue pencil through them claims, Lange," he suggested, between puffs. "Sark and Bassett forfeits everything."

"Not yet," procrastinated Lange. "The clock hasn't struck. Sit down."

Before Casino could turn to his chair, the door opened, and Sark and Bassett slouched in.

"Thunderation!" exclaimed Casino in deep chagrin. "Where'd you boys spring from?"

"Out of the night," sighed Sark.

"And nowhar," supplemented Bassett.

THEY dropped listlessly into chairs, as if completely exhausted, arms and legs trailing on the floor. This was their first meeting with Casino since he had landed in the midst of the Mounted Police to dispossess them of their townsite. Whether time had tempered their wrath or whether they were too tired to attempt any violence toward him, he did not know, but he saw that they cherished no such intention.

Their deepest desire seemed to be for rest, and they silently motioned Lawyer Lange to close up the deal. Sitting there, sweaty, disheveled, with torn, clay-stained clothes and rock-bruised hands, they showed plainly the evidence of a struggle with the niggard earth.

"You been prospectin', ain't you?" Casino hazarded.

"Yep, we bin burrowin' considerable," answered Bassett apathetically.

"Strike anything?"

"Uh-huh."

"What? A placer? Quartz vein?"

"We'd be fluted fools to tell you, wouldn't we? It's a new kind of pay-streak, anyway. You never seen the like."

"Thunder! Then you're here to talk retention? If you've got the goods, I'll sell. Give me my price, and I don't disturb you. Ten millions I'll take—on time. Not a cent less!"

"Ten hen-roosts!" sneered Sark. "What in blazes you take us for? We're not buying, anyhow. We're selling. Go on and sign those papers Lange has ready and pay the money over."

Casino counted out the quarter million in crisp, new bank-notes. It made quite a respectable pile upon Lange's desk Then Casino took up the pen to write his signature. With the last scratch of his pen, the clock struck twelve, and sharp on the sound of the final stroke there came a stupendous report, as of a thousand volleying cannon. Lange's office heaved and rocked to the concussion. His desk reared up, the inkwell painted the floor, and the clock crashed down off the wall. Casino jumped six feet. His cigar dropped from his mouth. His pen flew, point on, from his hand and stuck quivering in the door.

"What in blue blazes was that?" he demanded in an awed voice.

"Charpentier Glacier, I guess," interpreted Bassett, still sprawling lethargically in his chair.

"Yes, we saw she was some active when we passed her," Sark explained indifferently.

"Active?" echoed Casino. "And what in tarnation'll happen if she gets frantic?"

His eyes traveled to the pile of crisp

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bank-notes on Lange's desk. He took a step as if to recover them, but Lange, though apparently unaware of his intention, lifted them up at that moment and deposited them in his satchel.

"Oh, don't get excited over a glacier's grumblings!" he advised Casino with a cool, professional smile. "They're always up to some harmless little tricks."

At his words there came a second report, more violent than the first. It staggered Casino in the middle of the room. Outside he heard the cries of people and the pounding of running feet. The office door banged back on its hinges, and in the doorway stared the frightened faces of his close friends, Ante Baker and Gunboat Kane.

"Come on!" they exhorted. "The glacier's burst. The whole bloody town's doomed. Come on!"

CASINO rushed headlong out. Sark and Bassett arose and followed. Lawyer Lange, thrusting papers into his satchel, passed with them into the street and headed for the water-front where lay the steamer *Unalaska* in her dock.

"I'll just hurry along and get a berth before the rush," he whimsically observed, with a knowing nod and chuckle. "Besides, I'm subject to rheumatism, and I don't want to get my feet wet."

"Go on, then," laughed Sark. "It won't hurt us. We been wearing web feet for the last two weeks."

He and Bassett plunged onward through the center of the town, where reigned chaos greater than that of the night when electric light and Captain Constantine and Casino Charlie came to Charpentier. Five thousand habitually quiet and orderly citizens flung through the streets in a motley, shouting concourse, bearing their personal belongings on their heads and pressing wildly harborward to the safety of the *Unalaska's* decks.

The scourge of terror behind them was the convulsive turmoil of the Charpentier Glacier, bulking huge and high beyond the town. The vast ice mountain was torn with Titanic throes. Its blatant cannonading split the vault of the night and echoed monstrously from peak to peak. Continually it caved, immense fragments as huge as skyscrapers thundering down upon the moraine below.

With the ice came spouts of water. The twin streams at the glacier's foot had swelled to torrents. The whole surface of the moraine was inundated, and upon this slippery base of wet stones an enormous ice-train was sliding straight toward the town.

To the most casual eye it was apparent that some colossal force was at work in the subterranean caverns of the glacier. But none in the rout that night, except Sark and Bassett, could visualize that force. In the partners' minds, however, it was very clear. Up on the high plateau they had seen the ice-trains burst through the main gulch they were tunneling before the tunnel was completed, before its last rock-skin was pierced. They had seen their workmen scramble to the loftier levels as the barrier went out, carrying down with it the rock-drills, the tool-houses, and the Chilcats' camp. And they had marked it scour the mountainside clean as a pathway to Charpentier's head.

For this was no ordinary, snail-like glacial movement. The ice traveled with inconceivable rapidity, and it was the presence of water upon the plateau which imparted that rapidity. The frosts of Fall had not yet arrived. The Summer sun still had tremendous strength upon the immense flat surface of the plateau exposed to its rays. The gulches, which in Winter became the dry beds of ice-rivers, were at this season practically stagnant sloughs many miles in length, and the moment an outlet was made they drained their contents seaward down their former courses.

Thus Sark and Bassett, battling after Casino Charlie through the fleeing mob to the outskirts of the town, beheld the slow ice-creep of many years crammed into one lightning plunge of swift-flying seconds.

Like the crest of a tidal wave the ice-wall charged toward them.

"Great Heavens! Great Heavens!" Casino whined. He stood, weak-kneed, white-faced, twisting his shaking hands one over the other in a gesture of utter helplessness.

FASCINATION of the danger and agonizing curiosity as to its imminence and extent held him there with the partners when every other soul in Charpentier was boarding the *Unalaska*.

"What'll you take for your townsite now, Casino?" jeered Bassett.

"Great Heavens! A quarter-million dollars! When there won't be a square inch of

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the place left. A quarter of a million gone in one splurge! It wasn't mine, boys. I never had it. And them that backed me in the venture'll take my life for it."

"Then you'd better sell before it's too late," advised Bassett. "What you holdin' her at now?"

"Oh, don't crack jokes in a mausoleum!" groaned Casino. "For this is sure my burial ground."

"I mean it," Tom persisted. "What'll you take for it? Or, better, Eric and me'll make you an offer on it. Damaged goods generally go at half-price, and that's what we'll offer you. One hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Are you clean, plain and fully locoed?" demanded Casino, astounded.

"No more than we always were," Sark put in. "What Tom says goes. We mean business. You hand over the title, and we'll pay you an eighth of a million."

Whereat suspicions leaped through Casino Charlie, and his helplessness and pitiful despair vanished.

"Oh! You will, will you?" he sneered. "Then you've cooked this glacier rampage all up. That's where you've been this last two weeks. Out in the mountains tinkerin' with the floods and ice. You started this, and you didn't start it without makin' provision to stop it. So I don't sell. I hold on. You can't bluff me."

"There's no bluff about glaciers," Sark informed him. "They're surer than volcanoes. There goes the power-house now!"

On the instant Charpentier was plunged in darkness. The ice-wall, rearing ghastly white in the gloom, ground onward over the site of the power-house and demolished the temporary station which stood at the end of the railroad grading.

"No bluff about glaciers!" Eric repeated. "You hold on, Casino, and in fifteen minutes there won't be a scantling left of our —I mean your—town."

"Yes, and you hold on a leetle longer, Casino," grinned Bassett, "and we'll drive yon ice clean out into the harbor and acrost the Alaskan line agin. We'll change the coast formation, scour your town-site clean, and void your claim for all time to come. Sure, you better hold on, and instead of pickin' a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars outa the wreck, you won't pick up so much as a tin tobacco stamp to nail on your cabin wall!"

With the sudden descent of darkness Casino's anxiety, apprehension, and helplessness rushed over him again. He realized the stark truth of Bassett's statement, and under the strain of the disaster-fraught moment his stubborn spirit broke.

"Tarnation!" he whimpered, pulling out his deeds and documents from his breast pocket. "Here they are. I sell. Stop her! For Heaven's sake, stop her quick!"

THE moment the papers were in his hand, Bassett kneeled down, drew a huge rocket from his coat, stuck the stick end in a crack between two stones and touched a match to the fuse. A streak of crimson flame the rocket bored across the sky, and before its radiance had faded, answering sheets of flame dyed the crests of the coast peaks. Thunderous explosion succeeded thunderous explosion, booming out and echoing across the range, and the roar of rushing rock slides spaced the raucous reports.

"Dynamite!" Casino cried. "You got somebody up there corkin' the bottle."

"Sure," admitted Tom. "Henriks, our rock man, and Tagish Jim. Look! The water's dropped already, and the ice is anchored on the moraine. She won't move no more. Of course, the water'll remain a bit high, and they'll be wet feet in Charpentier's streets for a week or two. But that won't hurt nothin'. That ain't devastation and demolition. You listen, Casino, and I'll impart to you a leetle knowledge. A glacier is jist a lake—a lake of ice. When you shut off her ice-river, she goes dry."

"Thanks!" smiled Casino vindictively. "That's cheap knowledge. It only cost me one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. But maybe I'll get my money's worth out of it some day."

"Don't you ever think it!" laughed Bassett, catching the veiled threat. "That plateau up thar is private property. Eric and me staked it as a suburb of the town of Charpentier, jist to keep any malicious-minded geezer from goin' up thar in the years to come and agin invokin' the azoic law!"

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Under False Colors

by

Rudolph R. Krebs

Author of "The Getaway," "Night's Night and the Toad."

"THE GENTLEMAN" put a last artistic daub of dirt on his chin, bristling with a three-days' growth of stubble, brushed his hips with his grimy hands and stepped back a pace.

"How is it?" he asked of "Two-Bits," who, sprawling in the grass behind a heavy screen of bushes, was keeping a wary eye on the road to Ridgewood, a half mile distant. A hundred yards away the long greenhouse of Louie Businger reflected the glare of the afternoon sun.

Two-Bits' eyes reluctantly left the road and fixed themselves upon the Gentleman in a long and painstakingly careful scrutiny.

From the shock of unkempt hair down to the dusty, worn shoes, the Gentleman was a transformed being. Instead of the immaculate checked suit, the snowy collar, the spotless cerise cravat, and the fleckless patent leathers, he wore a heavy, coarse undershirt, open to the second rib of his hairy chest; a dusty pair of overalls, sadly frayed at the knees; a pair of shoes that had scraped acquaintance with miles of greenhouse aisles; and nothing else—unless we include the dull, slow-thinking expression that had settled on his honest German face.

Ages before, the Gentleman's name had been Gottlieb Neugebauer. He had been raised—they raised children as well as cattle in that section—on a farm six miles north of Watertown, Wisconsin, in what was then known as Little Germany.

He lived with an uncle—his parents having died a year or two after handicapping the boy in life's race by saddling him with that name—and managed to endure four-o'clock rising until he was fourteen years of age. And then, at half past four one morning, the uncle, wondering frothily how the boy had the gall to fritter away the forenoon by lying abed, mounted to the attic room with fire in his eye and a stick in his hand—to find the boy gone!

It was later discovered that the sum of fifty-seven cents that had reposed in the cracked vase in the parlor was also gone. Gottlieb Neugebauer, thenceforth "Dutch," had taken to professional pedestrianism.

After sundry adventures he arrived in Milwaukee, and, drifting in the current of least resistance and in crass defiance of his name, began his career as a second-story worker. His career was meteoric. But the physical risks of his vocation were too great, and since nature had endowed him with a shrewd, keen mind, behind a face guileless and open as an eight-day clock, and a very clever hand, he entered the higher realms of crookdom. His face inspired confidence, and Dutch capitalized his face.

If he had been less soft-hearted and more inclined to consistent endeavor, he would have made a respected if not respectable mining-stock promoter. He affected natty clothes, manicured nails, absurd hats, and glossy shoes, and acquired the pseudonym of the Gentleman. He changed his residence with conscientious frequency, being always two jumps—long ones—ahead of the Pinkertons.

His specialty—in this day and age every man who wants to succeed must be a specialist—was signing names, other people's,

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in the lower right-hand corner of a check.

That he might the more easily reap the rewards of this accomplishment, he had allied himself with one Two-Bits, a gentleman of skill and impudent daring.

On Monday the two had descended upon Ridgewood, a suburb of Chicago. In the guise of salesmen who were trying to interest the Board of Education in a new cleaning-device for the high school, they had cultivated the acquaintance of Louie Businger, treasurer of the board, owner of a mint in the form of a greenhouse, and a heavy depositor in the Merchants' and Farmers' National Bank.

Fate, aided by native shrewdness, German thrift raised to the *n*th power, and the cunning way dollars have when you loan them out at 8 per cent. and foreclose on the mortgage the stop-watch second it is due, had made Louie Businger the wealthiest and best-hated man in Ridgewood. He was a good subject on whom to operate.

The two crooks plied him with cigars, flattered him, encouraged him to talk freely about himself and his business, while they listened conscientiously.

They learned among other things that Louie was going to the city on Thursday, to be gone all day.

Ensued a lull of three days, in which Two-Bits assiduously cultivated a German accent until he was able to mimic their intended victim to the rolling of an r; in which also the Gentleman nursed a smarting, unshaven face and wondered gloomily whether the Girl would recognize him.

The Girl—but we need action.

"A SMEAR of that stuff on the side of your nose would make it look thinner," was Two-Bits' critical comment. "Then if you absolutely renig on breaking your finger-nails as I suggested, for the love of Mike show your hands as little as possible. Your flippers don't look as if they had answered the back-to-the-soil call, even if they are coated with mud."

"That's the boy!" he exclaimed approvingly, as the Gentleman looked at him uncomprehendingly. "You look as if you might count to thirteen if they gave you time enough!"

"I'll pass, I guess. What time is it?"

"Three-ten. What time does the bank close?"

"Three - thirty. We'd better start. There's nobody but Mrs. Businger up at the house. Don't scare her more than you can help. If there's a slip-up, you know what to do."

Two-Bits looked at him quickly.

"What's eating you?" he asked. "There ain't anything goana happen. We got this job cinched."

"Do you remember that girl I helped across the street on Monday? Well, I found out that she's a stenographer in the bank. I hope she does not recognize me."

"Rot! You need a pull of something."

Two-Bits drew forth a flask and presented it.

"You know I've cut that out!" refused the Gentleman. "You'd better, too, if you want to keep out of Joliet."

"That's right," reflected the other. "You haven't touched it since Monday. Now I wonder——"

Under the coating of grime the Gentleman's face flushed an embarrassed red.

"Now beat it!" he ordered, to cover his confusion. "After the coast is clear fetch my clothes up to the house. So long."

He skirted the bushes, after assuring himself that there was no one in sight, and started in a lope for the village, while Two-Bits circled about to gain the rear entrance of the Businger home.

HE FOUND the kitchen door ajar. Without the formality of knocking he stepped lightly inside. There was no one about. He closed the door and locked it noiselessly. He took out his handkerchief, knotted it loosely about the lower part of his face, pulled his slouch hat down over his eyes, drew his revolver, a huge antiquated weapon, and with an exaggerated bow to an imaginary audience tiptoed to the dining-room door.

It yielded under his gentle pressure, and he slipped through. He stood there, listening intently, for a minute. From the room above him came the groaning of loose boards as some one moved about on a carpeted floor.

Two-Bits rubbed his hands. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. The element of risk set his heart beating in glad ragtime; his eyes sparkled between the hat and handkerchief-mask.

His shoes made no sound on the rug as he passed through the living-room and entered what must have been the parlor, for the

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shades were tightly drawn, and a plush-covered album held the place of honor on the center table. From the shadowy wall grim crayon-portraits—one and a half life-sized—followed his every movement with stern eyes. A vase in the corner held an assortment of cat-tails and peacock-feathers.

Two-Bits put his thumb to his nose and twiddled his fingers irreverently at the frowning portraits, then made for a door half concealed by a gorgeous portière.

With his hand on the knob, he paused. It was heavy with the dust of Winter, indicating that the door had long been unused. The hinges might creak if he opened it. He released the knob and returned to the dining-room, where he had observed a door that should lead to the front hallway.

It opened readily and he found himself in a spacious anteroom from which a flight of steps led to a roomy landing and thence to the floor above. A mirror—diamond-shaped—from whose frame hat and coat-pegs bristled, hung against the wall.

Two-Bits gazed at his counterfeit there reflected, raised his handkerchief a fraction, depressed his hat slightly, glared, and then, satisfied that his appearance was sufficiently formidable, ascended the stairs. On the way he tried the front door and found it locked. The telephone on the landing caught his eye. In his devotion to art he had momentarily forgotten the object of his house-breaking. He hurried faster.

From the room at the farther end of the long narrow corridor upon which he emerged came a low, nasal humming. He listened. The end room was the only one occupied.

All the rooms, like those down stairs, he noticed in passing, were meagerly furnished; as if the Businger' thrift had denied them even the comforts of a home. To a man to whom money had no value except as it enabled him to gratify his desires, the pinching economy of one who already had more than he could comfortably spend was incomprehensible.

He came to the open door of the room and looked within. A thin woman, clad in a loose, faded-blue house-dress, was putting the final smoothing touches to a crazy-quilt spread on the bed. She had her back to the door, and was unaware of Two-Bits' presence until the latter gave vent to a discreet cough.

She straightened swiftly and turned.

"Ma'am," came in muffled tones the suave voice of the intruder, "scream, if you want to. Don't mind me—there's no one else about. I can stand it, I guess."

MRS. BUSINGER had fully intended to scream. In fact, she had opened her mouth to its widest extent to provide an exit sufficiently large to accommodate the yell she considered proportionate to the occasion. But when this insolent wretch, looking at her unwaveringly over the gleaming pistol, actually requested her to scream, she shut her angular jaws with an obstinate snap.

She was a prematurely aged woman. Greed had left its tell-tale marks on her thin, hard face, her small eyes and tight-lipped mouth. When strangers remarked on the apparent reluctance of Louie Businger to part with a nickel, those who knew invariably remarked:

"Tight? Great grief! He's a no-account spendthrift compared with his wife. Why, she saves all the egg-shells, and when she has enough she makes chicken soup out of them."

Two-Bits had heard and disbelieved. Now he accepted it as gospel truth.

"What do you want?" she asked in a voice like the rasp of a file.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing, except to ask you to step to that little door there and open it."

She obeyed wonderingly, keeping a fearful eye on the revolver.

"It's only an empty closet," she said, as she threw the door wide.

Two-Bits stepped forward, as if to verify her assertion. He stepped close to her. And before she knew what had happened, he had placed his hand, not ungently, against the small of her back and pushed her inside.

He locked the door, drew up a straight-backed chair, propped it below the knob, and then rapped sharply with his revolver upon the panel.

The shrill-voiced imprecations, issuing from within, ceased abruptly.

"Ma'am," Two-Bits said sadly, "I hated to do it. Honest, I did. And before I go I want to warn you that physiologists have demonstrated that a human female exhausts one cubic hexameter of air every minute. If you don't want to suffocate,

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I'd advise you to remain perfectly quiet. I——"

From the hall came the jingling of the telephone-bell. Two-Bits raced down to answer it.

MEANWHILE the Gentleman, hatless, coatless, his elbows hugging his sides, was running up the street to the Merchants' and Farmers' National Bank. His lumbering gait attracted the attention of the cashier, who happened to glance out of the window while the Gentleman was still two blocks away; a circumstance that materially aided the crook to put over his assumed character when he burst in through the door a few minutes later.

He trod heavily to the cashier's wicket and drew a slip of paper from the blouse-pocket of his overalls. He brushed a smudge of dirt from one corner, pursing his lips ruefully, and pushed it below the grating.

"Louie says for you to put it in a sack. 'Larche bills,' he says. Right avay he vants it," he blurted, puffing from the violent exertion.

His message delivered, he turned away from the wicket, and with the frank curiosity of a farm-hand let his gaze wander idly about the banking-room. From a hip-pocket he drew forth a bandanna handkerchief and mopped his brow. The action was carelessly natural, yet it served to conceal his face for the instant that the Girl lifted her eyes from her typewriter.

The cashier, with an amused grin at the uncouth figure before him—the grin intended for the benefit of the Girl, who, however, remained serenely unconscious—extended a flabby hand to take the check. When he perceived the amount for which it had been made out, his eyes widened in astonishment. He turned it front and back several times. Holding it between thumb and forefinger he threw out sharply:

"Here, you! Did Mr. Businger ask you to cash this?"

The stolid German face turned toward him in puzzled inquiry.

"Huh?"

"I say, did Mr. Businger send you to cash this for him?"

"No. 'No cash,' he says. 'Larche bills, Otto. In a sack,'" the dull-witted messenger replied, as if repeating a lesson.

The cashier snorted impatiently. Then he returned to the attack.

"Who are you? What's your name?" he demanded gruffly.

The German wrinkled his brows in anxious bewilderment. A light finally came into his eyes; his face broke into a good-humored, flattered smile. The farm-hand fairly beamed!

"Me? Otto—Otto Schmidt. I vork by Businger. Gärtner," he responded eagerly.

The truth evidently. The cashier's eyes took in every detail of the man's dress, from the tattered knees to the coarse woolen shirt, and finally came to rest on the stupidly honest face.

"Hm! I guess it's all right. But four thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars!" he muttered, as he looked again at the check. "Great guns! What does the man want with it? And why in thunderation didn't he come himself?"

At mention of the amount, the Girl looked up quickly. Her limpid blue eyes dwelt for a fleeting instant on the Gentleman's face, and dropped back to her work. His heart leaped, but his face remained impassive. In her eyes there had been no hint of recognition—merely momentary interest.

"Is Mr. Businger home?" came the grating voice of the cashier.

"Yop. I think so. He vas dere ven I left."

"I guess it's all right," repeated the cashier to himself, "but I'd better telephone."

He went to the desk and taking down the receiver of the telephone, he called for a number. After an interval of waiting:

"Hello? Is this Businger's? This is Mr. Simpkins, of the bank," he asserted pompously. "There's a man here with a check for four thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars, made out to yourself and signed by you. It—I did not know whether you author——"

"*Donnerwetternochamal!* Aindt you sent dot mit Otto alretty? Vot's der matter mit der sheck? Aindt mein balanks—I haf a man vaiting der hull afternoon——" came a choleric German voice, audible even to the Girl.

She suppressed a giggle chokily, as the red mounted behind the ears of the officious cashier.

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"Surely! Certainly! That's all right. Yes, sir! I just wanted to protect—— Excuse me. I'll send it right up. Yes, sir."

The distressed official fell over himself in his anxiety to placate the big depositor.

He replaced the receiver savagely up on its hook and turned belligerently to his cage, where he snapped rubber bands around bundles of bank-notes with a small boy's display of temper.

In the interim the Gentleman's eyes reverted often to the Girl. To his credit as a consummate actor, be it said, that although the smooth whiteness of her neck and the delicate ringlets of hair that curled demurely above it stirred him irresistibly, he never betrayed more than shallow interest.

"Here you are!" snapped the cashier, as he shoved a fat package across the marble slab.

His rancor vented itself on the innocent cause of his discomfiture.

"Why didn't you tell me you were Businger's hired man in the first place? Get a move on; your boss is waiting for that. And see that he gets it!" he bullied.

"Sure, all right, t'anks!" the dullard replied equably.

He stuffed the package into his blouse, hugging it to him with one grimy, determined hand. With an abashed "Goot-by" he bolted out of the door.

When he reached the fringe of bushes he stopped running. Under pretext of tying his shoe-lace he stooped over and scanned the street by which he had come to see if he was being watched from the village. He raised his head and took a cautious peep at the Businger house.

From a side window Two-Bits beckoned reassuringly. He straightened up and walked slowly up the porch steps. Two-Bits swung open the door and admitted him.

"Got the picture post-cards?" he asked, grinning a welcome.

The Gentleman drew forth the package and tossed it carelessly to him.

"What's that?" he asked sharply. A measured thumping came from above.

"Only the lady of the house. I had to lock her up in a closet. She's safe, but a little hot around the collar."

He recounted his unexciting experiences.

"Hot water, your razor, and your duds are in the kitchen," he announced. "Let's beat it while the beating's good. Hustle! I'll keep my eyes peeled."

Midway of his shaving operation, the Gentleman burst into a sudden cackle of laughter that brought Two-Bits hurrying to him from the dining-room window, where he was keeping watch.

"Ha-ha! You—you—sure did annex the cashier's angora!" were the words with which he was greeted. "Ha-ha haw! I wish you could have seen his face. Mad? He'd chew glass and enjoy it. And the Girl — say, Two-Bits—" very soberly — "she's a dream!"

AT SEVEN o'clock that evening, two gentlemen dawdled over their coffee and cigars in ——'s, a modest restaurant in Chicago. One of them, the one in the checked suit, pushed aside his demi-tasse. He rested his arms upon the table and leaned forward confidentially.

"Two-Bits, do you remember the Girl I helped across the muddy street the first day we struck Ridgewood—the Girl who I was afraid would recognize me this afternoon?"

"Lemme see."

The other screwed his face into what he considered an expression of reflection and scratched his head, as if thereby to stimulate his cells of thought.

"A blondy, with a picture hat, wasn't she?" he guessed wildly.

The Gentleman threw out his hands in a gesture of pained negation.

"Two-Bits, your powers of observation on anything not connected with your line are sadly dulled. No; she wore a tailored, brown coat with that cutaway effect, you know, and a brown toque. Her hair was a vivid golden-brown, Two-Bits, but perhaps you didn't notice. You must have seen how delicately arched was the instep she revealed as she lifted her dress. Now, honestly, didn't you?"

Two-Bits shook his head and wondered what the man was driving at.

"When I set her across on the other side, she gave me a dazzlingly brilliant smile of thanks. And she held my hand an instant longer than was necessary." A fatuous smile chased across his handsome face. "She liked me, Two-Bits! I'm certain of that. A woman's eyes speak louder than words. A pressure of the hand conveys a world of meaning. I think the Girl could learn to care for me."

Two-Bits snorted.

"I do!" the Gentleman asserted defiantly.

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"Two-Bits, you know nothing about it. You're a rank mis—mis—well, woman-hater, that's what you are!"

The maligned party offered no protest.

"Her eyes were as deep a blue," the Gentleman continued musingly, "as the violets in Tony Garibaldi's window, and had little black flecks in them when she turned them full upon you. Her nose was tilted just enough to make the most cold-blooded man wish to kiss the pert lips below. I never saw such lips, Two-Bits. Those of the women you and I have known were petted and pampered, put to bed at night with a covering of cold-cream, and dressed for the street in the morning. Hers were the genuine article. Soft as rose-petals, and as red as the ruby in your tie. Her chin—ah, Two-Bits, I wish you would have noticed her chin! It—it—— Oh, well, you wouldn't understand anyhow," he finished hopelessly.

The Gentleman pushed his hands deep down into his pockets and stared moodily before him.

Two-Bits looked at him curiously.

"You sure have 'em bad, old sport," he ventured, after a long, uncomfortable silence in which he picked nervously at the cloth. "Why don't you write a pome? They all do."

"No kidding—please!" the Gentleman pleaded, raising his wobegone countenance. "I'm hit hard," he admitted with boyish candor. "I fell dead in love with that girl the moment I saw her, though I wouldn't admit it even to myself until just now. If I thought she did not care for me it would be different. But I think she does. At least I judge so, from her look that morning. This afternoon, when she was bending over her typewriter, I had all I could do to keep from jumping the rail and cuddling my nose in the soft ivory of her neck."

"Help!" sang out the hardened recipient of these confidences. "If you're so much in love with the skirt, and have a sneaking idea she'd fall for you, why don't you go and tell her?"

"That's just the devil of it," was the glum response. "Any one with half an eye can see that a pure, innocent little girl like that wouldn't have a thing to do with a crook like me."

"Who's goana tell her you're a crook? And even at that, our business is just as honorable though not as profitable as many I could name that are all to the Sunday collection-plate."

The Gentleman's face flooded with swift indignation.

"D'you think I'd be as rotten bad as all that? To take advantage of a loving, trusting child? To win my way by pretending to be better than I am? Man, I couldn't look her in the face and *lie* to *her!*"

"Oh, well, it's your funeral!" exclaimed Two-Bits testily. "I'm no advice-to-the-lovelorn column. Weep on the neck of Beatrice. You're blamed rotten company, I must say. I'd sooner talk to a real live undertaker at a burial."

He opened his newspaper with an energetic rustling of the leaves and pretended to bury himself in the Mexican situation. But his eyes strayed often to the blue young man opposite.

The Gentleman lapsed into moody silence. His eyes had a misty, far-away look, as if he were thinking of what might be if Fate had not put that twist in his character. Something prompted him to believe that if he could meet the Girl on her level, he might win her for his own. The lover in him had noticed that her tapering fingers were bare of rings. She could hardly be twenty-two, he mused; and she was a prize for which a man might well give everything he possessed, and be many times the richer by his bargain.

In ——'s, the early diners are treated to classical selections, the lighter, popular pieces being reserved for the fag-end of the evening. From the table where the two were seated the orchestra was hidden by a jutting angle of the wall. A hush fell on the assembled guests as the musicians strummed the introduction to one of Grieg's tender love-songs. And then a clear, girlish voice:

"Du mein Gedanke, du mein Sein und Werden,
Du meines . . .
Ich liebe dich wie nichts auf dieser Erde;
Ich liebe dich, Ich liebe dich."

The Gentleman rose to his feet, his face working.

"It's rank desertion, old man," he said huskily, as he held out his hand. "It may look like I'm handing you a raw deal—but I simply can't help it. I'm over my ears in love with that girl, and I'm going back to tell her so. I'm quitting the crooked business, Two-Bits. I'll make a clean breast of

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everything, and if she's willing to risk giving me a chance I'll work my fingers to the quick to make enough for two in a square proposition. That girl has no business slaving in an office. I'm going to give her a home. So long, old man. Don't hold it against me. I'm going back to Ridgewood."

Two-Bits was at first too thunderstruck to make any expostulations; then, when he saw the lines of inflexible purpose in the Gentleman's face, he decided that it would be worse than useless to try to dissuade him.

A long-dormant impulse stirred to life within him. After all, there wasn't any real, lasting satisfaction in their crooked life. He, too, had more than once been on the point of "chucking the graft." And if a man had a good woman to keep him straight, the fight would be that much more worth while.

If ever the Gentleman wanted to break away from lure of easy money, now was the time for him to do it; and he, Two-Bits, would not stand in his way.

So he returned the pressure of the other's hand and said quietly, with a ring of sincerity:

"All right, old horse. Go to it! Wish you the best of luck. If she turns you down—and I don't believe she will, from what you've told me of her—come back. Come back anyhow."

EIGHT o'clock found the Gentleman ringing the doorbell of an unassuming, rambling bungalow, where, he had ascertained by guarded inquiry, the Girl roomed.

The first flush of resolution had flamed out, leaving him cold with apprehension. It had required all the manly fiber he possessed to walk up the steps; but he felt he was committed to the venture and would have no rest until he had carried it to its conclusion.

The Girl herself came to the door. She gave a little gasp of dismay upon seeing who it was, but quickly recovered herself.

"Did you want to see Mrs. Henry?" she asked, and only a slight tremor in her voice betrayed her agitation.

"No. I wanted to see you," answered the Gentleman quietly. "You remember me, do you not? I have something I want to tell you—alone, please?" gently persuasive.

"Oh!"

In mute interrogation she looked at him as if she half suspected the nature of his message. She glanced irresolutely at the door behind her, whence came a murmur of voices, and then back at him with open appraisal.

With the lamp-light falling on her from behind, bringing out in sharp relief her delicate features and her trim, girlish form, she presented a most entrancing picture.

"There's a bench and some chairs at that end of the veranda," she said graciously, pointing a shapely, white arm. "I must get a wrap and ask Mrs. Henry to excuse me. Then, if what you have to tell me is *very* important, you may tell me there."

She forced an air of lightness into her words.

It was more than he had dared expect, and as he made his way to the dimly illumined corner, his heart beat high with hope.

It was a beautifully clear night. The air was redolent of lilac and hyacinth. Under the trees the shadows were soft as velvet. Earth and sky oozed peace and content. Something of the spirit of the night seemed to permeate the Gentleman's inner being. His bitter self-accusation melted into softened regret. That which was done was done. He could no longer control the past—but the future, big with possibilities, lay before him.

The screen-door clicked and the Girl stepped out. A gossamer scarf floated on her shoulders and caressed her neck.

"Isn't it a glorious evening?" she queried, as she took a chair opposite the Gentleman.

The tone in which she said it, and the little gurgle of laughter that accompanied it, divested the phrase of any suggestion of triteness.

Both were under high tension, and to establish a basis of naturalness they chatted light, safe commonplaces. The Gentleman was a brilliant conversationalist when he wanted to be. Now he put his heart and soul into the art of pleasing. They got along famously. Her laugh rippled often, and the Gentleman thought he had never heard a more delightful sound. Yet below even her gayest sally there ran an undercurrent of uneasy constraint.

It was in a lull of the conversation, perhaps a half hour later, that the Girl bent toward him and asked softly—

"What was it you wanted to tell me?"

The abruptness of her question startled him. With a shock came the realization of

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his perfidy in ingratiating himself under false colors. A moment before it had seemed such a beautifully clear night; now he first became aware of the darkness. It was as if he had been permitted a peep into heaven and the door had been shut in his face. The Girl, leaning forward in her chair, was waiting for him to answer. He wet his lips and, although it wrenched his heart-strings, he forced himself to confess.

"I don't have much to tell you, and yet it means much to me—pretty nearly everything, in fact—how you will take it. Please, if it's not too much to ask, will you listen to me patiently until I have finished? And will you then be as charitable in your judgment of me as your big heart can persuade you to be?"

He did not wait for her reply. She had returned to her former position, her chin cradled in the palm of her hand, her elbow on the arm-rest of her chair. The Gentleman proceeded:

"The day I helped you across the street a strange feeling came over me that I had met you somewhere before."

Her strong young fingers bit deeply into her cheek at this; her breath came faster.

"Since that time you have never been out of my thoughts. I have heard your voice even though you were miles away, have seen your smile whenever I closed my eyes. Try as I would, I could not place you. And then tonight it suddenly came to me. You were the girl I had been carrying in my heart for years and years.

"All men seek their ideals. Some few fortunate ones find them. I felt I had found mine in you. And I wished to high Heaven I were something different, that I might tell you of my love openly, without having to confess that I was sailing under false colors. Who—what do you think I am?" he finished hoarsely.

"You aren't—you aren't a——" with an instinctive shrinking.

"Yes, I'm a crook!" he interjected bitterly. "I'm a thief, a forger. I hated to work for a living—and I stooped to steal."

On the face that was directed toward him there was no shocked abhorrence, as he had feared, but a queer mingling of astonishment, relief, and puzzled inquiry. The Girl apparently did not realize the enormity of that to which he confessed.

"The day I met you," he continued, clutching a straw of hope because of her silence, "I had my plans laid to rob the bank in which you are. This afternoon, under your very eyes, I cashed a forged——"

That was as far as he got. Her head came up with a snap. Even in the half-light he saw swift recognition flash into her eyes.

"So *that* was *you!*" she cried. "Oh, you—you——" She choked, and put a hand to her throat.

"Do you know what you have done?" she resumed fiercely, swamping his half-uttered pleadings in a torrent of reproach. "Do you know what you have done to me? Listen! I came here three weeks ago, and had to fight to get the position left vacant by the sudden retirement of the former stenographer. I crawled to get it. And because I was familiar to some extent with banking routine, and because I was willing to come for a dollar less per week than the other applicants, and—" defiantly—"because I was a 'peach,' I secured the position. And I worked like the mischief to make good.

"And now you come in and spoil it all. Tomorrow, when that Dutchman, Businger, comes in and that pin-head cashier finds he's been bumped for a few thousands—" in her fury she slipped unconsciously into the vernacular—"he'll raise a howl that will be heard clear to Chicago. The "Pinks" will be buzzing around like a swarm of hornets, and little Mabel, if she's here—and you may bet your sweet life she won't be—will get it in the neck. They suspect me for other jobs.

"Saturday I would have faded with at least $23,000! And you queer it for a handful of change! You cheap grafter!"

She rose to her feet, her breast heaving, her hands clenched tightly at her sides.

"I thought you were a "Pink," dotty over me. I thought you came to warn me to quit. And you're nothing but a cheap molly-buzzer, a penny-snatcher, a dip! Butting in on a $23,000 haul for a bit of cigar money! *Good night!*"

A swish of skirts, a slamming of the door, and she was gone.

Five minutes later the Gentleman rose unsteadily to his feet and walked feebly down the flower-bordered path.

"Now ain't that —— ?" he asked of the unresponsive night. "Now ain't that ——?"

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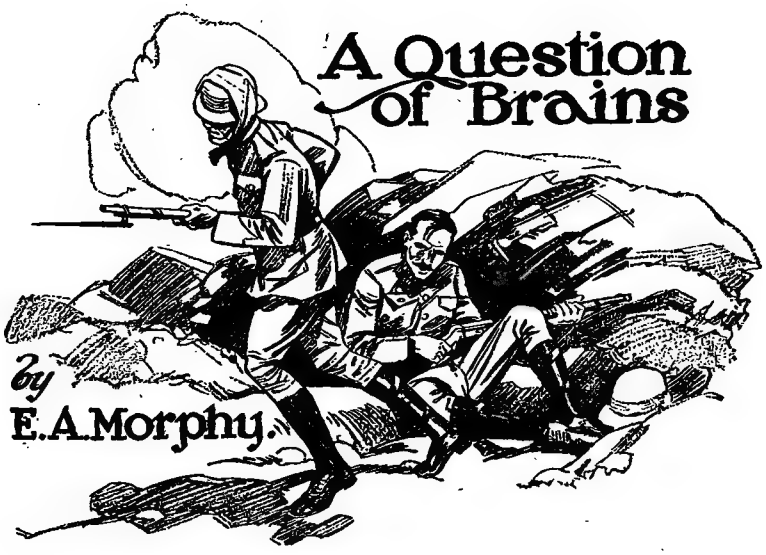

Author of "The Poker Players of Palinggu," etc.

PRIVATE Nathaniel Salter was praying with a devoutness regrettably uncommon in men of his rank and calling.

There could be no question as to the sincerity of his orisons; but his piety suggested not so much the enthusiasm of the saint with a labor of love to perform as the eager frenzy of the tardy penitent who finds himself with a heavy conscience to unload and scant time wherein to compass the unloading.

The latter was Salter's true predicament.

Spick! Spack! Piff! Paff!

At irregular but infinitesimal intervals, and on every side of the preoccupied soldier, bullets, nails, bits of wire and missiles of all the other varied brands affected by tribesmen on the Border whined through the heated atmosphere and tossed up irritating little spurts of dust.

In addition to these distractions of environment, Salter's devotions were seriously handicapped by a total absence of that soul-sustaining reliance upon the mercies of Providence which only a lifelong persistence in exercises of a very spiritual savor is calculated to instil.

A three-inch length of telegraph wire—shot slug-fashion from some zealous Afridi's *jezail*—had torn the dome from Salter's helmet. Simultaneously it had ripped a piece off the top of Salter's head. The blood that trickled freely through his bristly hair, and into his ears, and painted his neck and face a horrid red, told Salter that much.

Hence his frantic state of mind.

Foremost among the obsessions that fomented his perturbation was a vivid belief in eternal punishment of a peculiarly poisonous kind.

Though he could not look at the top of his head, and dared not lift his fingers to the wound lest the touch of them should make him shriek with agony, Salter was as fully aware as a man may be of anything on this side of the grave, that his brains had been denuded of their upper tegument and were cooking in the brazen sunshine of the Tirah.

At any instant the cooking process might reach the seat of those reasoning faculties which alone enabled him to recall the slips and errors for which it was necessary that prompt reparation should be effected, and to formulate such acts of contrition as were necessary to offset his lapses. Should the cooking supervene ere the tale of penitence was complete, then every previous spasm of contrition would become futile.

Such, at any rate, was the inexorable conviction of Private Salter. His mind was racing against death for the guerdon of his

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salvation, and the outlook was disquieting in the extreme.

Spick! Spack! Piff! Paff!

Incessantly and all about him spat up those vicious little whiffs of bullet-driven dust.

By some devilish train of mentality that no layman could aspire to explain, the smell of these whiffs recalled to Salter's shriveling memory the smell of his own loved Brixton High Street on a Summer Saturday night. Thus it momentarily diverted his thoughts from the supreme gravity of his actual situation, and seduced them back through time and space to the luscious hospitalities of the "Prince of Wales" public house, and the alluring smiles of the glad-eyed ladies in its saloon bar.

For one delicious fraction of a jiffy Salter's memory dallied with those dead delights. Then, high above the clamant hubbub of battle, dissipating alike the fantom aromas of stout and sawdust and the beguilement of the glad-eyed ladies' smiles, Salter's soul shrieked at Salter for his betrayal of its all-too-brief opportunity:

"One of them perishing Zakkas will sock out your blinking daylights in 'arf a perishing tick!" bleated the accusing soul. "Then you'll go plumb to the bottom of the Pit, all along of your swanking and boozing when you ought to be a-saying of your prayers!"

Salter writhed in an overwhelming spasm of penitence and started a new and particularly earnest series of promises and protestations. A Martini bullet cut through his collar, scalded his neck, and zipped between the wrists of his hands, upraised in supplication.

"Blimey!" squeaked Salter to the ineffable vastnesses of the sky. "'Ow in 'eavin can a poor suffering blighter say his perishing prayers when they're trying all the time to shoot him in the neck?"

He flattened his six feet two inches of brawn and muscle face down on the blistering sand, and groveled in the agony of his despair. Then, suddenly raising himself to his knees again, he resumed at lightning speed his interrupted devotions.

MEANWHILE the ambushed picket, whereof Salter had formed an integral if unimportant unit ere Fate smote him on the poll, was rapidly resolving itself into a shambles.

As soon as the luckless party could re-form itself after the first shock of unforeseen attack, the officer in command had rushed his men to a little hollow in the rocks, less than a hundred paces farther on. This promised shelter a trifle better than the rough but open roadway of the defile through which they had been marching.

There, at the cost of half a dozen fresh casualties, they had run up a breastwork of rocks so as to form the hollow into what is known as a *sangar*.

It was not until this breastwork was high enough to afford protection to the wounded that Captain Cruikshank stood up fully to survey his position and his losses.

There were seven dead men below in the pass where they had been surprised. The survivors had had all they could do to fetch along their wounded. Cruikshank himself had snatched up the bugler, who had dropped at his side, and carried him over his shoulder while they ran the gantlet. As he glanced across the breastwork and looked down the pass to see if the Afridis were coming up to seek and mutilate the dead, his astonished gaze fell upon the figure of Private Salter, who was kneeling fairly in the center of the rough pathway, his clasped hands extended dramatically toward heaven, his parched lips gabbling in prayer.

"We can't leave that man out there, Nolan!" said he to the hard-bitten sergeant at his side. "They'll chop him into living mincemeat if we do!"

The sergeant snapped together his heavy jaws.

"No, sir," said he. "We won't leave him there!"

A minute later—inspired by no sense of mercy, but consumed by a wrath so fierce that it paralyzed his normally incomparable powers of blasphemy—Nolan leaped over the *sangar* wall and raced through the storm of lead in quest of Private Salter.

Mute as an oyster, but agile as a monkey, the sergeant flung himself upon the praying soldier and grabbed him by the back of the neck.

Unlike the majority of cockneys, Salter, as stated, was a giant of towering bulk. But Nolan, though standing scarce five feet eight in his socks, yanked up the private from his knees to his feet, and shook him as a terrier would shake a rabbit. Not a word did he utter.

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Salter balanced himself automatically, like a somnambulist, and continued to gabble out strings of incomprehensible prayers while the sergeant stepped back a few paces and picked up the man's abandoned rifle.

Salter was still praying when Nolan returned, speechless with fury, the rifle in his hand, spitting out air like an angry snake.

Bereft of language, the sergeant could only act. Opening a fist that was hard as a griddle, he clouted Salter in the jaw. Then as the wretched man reeled around under the blow, he caught him with the toe of his heavy boot—fair in the seat of his trousers.

Salter spun forward like a drunken shuttlecock, arms out, grasping the air blindly, in the effort to avert a fall.

"Halt!" yapped the recovered voice of Nolan.

The red horror of his wound, the blighting imminence of the Pit, the cackle of the Lee-Metfords and the rattle of the Martinis and *jezails*, all vanished instantly out of Salter's scheme of things. The kick and the blow, instead of scattering his unprotected brains, restored the inexorable sway of discipline. He stopped like a stricken hare.

"Come back for your rifle!"

Nolan lurched angrily as he spat out the command. Then, circumspectly as Agag, he tottered two steps forward, laid down Salter's rifle, and seated himself gently in the spot whence Salter had just been ejected.

Salter came back.

"You'll be after excusing me for taking a chair, won't you, Miss Salter?" sniggered the sergeant with scathing politeness. "And you'll be after picking up your own jewel-handled parasol—you swine!" he continued, in a voice of deepening harshness.

"And you'll say, 'Thank you so kindly, sawgeant!'" he added as a happy afterthought, and with a mincing accent that mingled ill with his hoarseness and his Limerick brogue.

"You'll say it just thataways, I'm after telling yez: 'Thank you so kindly, sawgeant. I'm awfully obliged, I'm suah! It was so bleeding thoughtful of you too, sawjeant! The weathaw's so perishing hot!'"

Salter gazed back into the mocking gray eyes that held him mesmerized, and stooped—still gazing into them—for his rifle.

"You'll be afther saying it now!" rasped Nolan venomously. "Bowing to me gracious-like, and smiling on me calm, and genteel, and collected, as if you was the Duchess of Whitechapel dining at Buckingham Palace, and passing your plate to the Widow for a second helping of tripe!"

Piff! Paff! Spick! Spack!

The medley of assorted missiles pinged down more fiercely than ever from the smoke-wreathed rocks and ridges, but they failed to impress Salter as terribly as the clear gray eyes that glowered up at him from beneath the bushy black brows of Sergeant Nolan.

He picked up the rifle gingerly, and began to recite the untimely speech, in a fearsome and nervous stutter:

"Thank you so kindly, sawgeant. I'm orfully obliged——"

Nolan stopped him with a snarl.

"'Shun!"

Salter sprang to attention. His heels met with a click.

"Be the Hokey!" soliloquized the sergeant, still scowling critically at the giant Fusileer. "'Tis belike I've done my last job of work, putting the hat on your—— Glory Allyluyahs; but anyways I'm sending you back to your section like a sodger, and not like a whimpering nun with the pip!"

The cockney's wavering gaze sought vainly to elude the withering glitter of the sergeant's eyes.

"Where are yez looking at?" snapped Nolan. "Are yez listening? No perishing, sobbing slackers, begobs, goes back, slouching, with me looking at 'em! D'ye hear? Right about!"

By a supreme effort Salter succeeded in snatching one furtive glance beyond the pale of enchantment. He peeped at the sand wherein the peppering bullets, which no longer wrought him harm, continued to kick up the little spurts of dust that had proved so annoying while he prayed.

Then he saw that Nolan was seated in a gradually widening pool of red.

ON THE instant the spell was broken.

"Gorblimey, sawgeant!"

He dropped to his knees beside the oppressor, and passed a great ape-like arm behind his shoulders.

"Gorblimey, sawgeant! You're hit! Here, take the blinking rifle!"

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The scowl slowly melted out of Nolan's gray eyes as he essayed to refuse the weapon that Salter handed to his keeping.

"Don't be a blithering idiot!" he growled. "They've copped me fair! Me leg's bruk. Get back!"

Private Salter, remembering that his brain was bare, and that for him the end of all things earthly was near at hand, spoke to Sergeant Nolan as man to man.

"Shut yer —— Irish beer-trap!" said he. "And 'old the blinking gun, or I'll bash in yer perishing cokernut!"

He stood up bravely, the sergeant gathered to his breast like a little child.

"They've tored the lid off mine!" he added as a sort of after-thought. "Off me cokernut," he explained bitterly. "And me brines is being fried alive!"

He looked about hurriedly. The *sangar* seemed to be miles away. There were better shelters close by, anyhow; and Salter—though still realizing that he had not much time for anything—wanted to try to think.

Not fifty paces to the right of him was a neat little natural arrangement in rocks which would afford far better protection than the *sangar*. It would accommodate half a dozen men at a pinch, while he and the sergeant were only two. He could carry Nolan there and wait for a better opportunity to make a rush for the *sangar*, the front of which this handy cleft faced at such an angle as practically to enfilade it.

To the cleft, accordingly, stalked Private Salter, unslain, and amazed only at the strength which enabled him to perform such a miracle despite the atrocious nature of his wound.

As Salter reasoned in his primitive and uneducated way, the brain had been able to expand through the hole in the "lid of his cokernut." That eased the pain and prevented his head from throbbing. But nothing could prevent such a soft substance as brain-matter from shriveling quickly in the dry atmosphere of the Tirah, even if it did not get actually cooked before sundown. Then up would go the number of Private Nathaniel Salter.

One or two fresh but minor wounds irritated him as he fought his way to the cleft—especially a small slug in the calf of the leg, which made him limp a little. But—as Salter looked at the case—what does one slug more or less in the calf of the leg matter to a man who has lost the top of his skull?

Nolan, shot through the hip, hugged his own and Salter's rifles and amiably protested against Salter's well-intended efforts.

"'Tis only wasting time yez are, me boy!" he protested. "We'll all be hash in half an hour's time. They've got us, neck and crop—lock, stock, and barrel!"

Even as the sergeant exhorted him, the soldier seemed to give a jump. He did not actually jump, but Nolan knew what the quiver meant.

"Ye're hit again! Dhrop me, ye omadhaun!" he commanded.

From the side of a great oblong boulder that lay like a natural portico across the top of the shallow embrasure in the rocky wall of the pass toward which Salter was hurrying, a puff of smoke suddenly expanded, and rose upward round as a ball.

Save for the first start, the Fusileer made no sign of discomfort. He did not even stagger.

From beneath the slowly rising ball of smoke the gaunt figure of a hillman sprang and jumped to the rocks below, lithely as a deer.

"Dhrop me!" grunted Nolan into Salter's ear. "Dhrop me—or you're gone!"

Salter halted.

"Shoot him, —— you!" he gobbled at the sergeant, speaking like a man with a marble in his mouth. "You've the gun!"

From the boulder whence the hillman jumped to the rocks beneath was a drop of over twelve feet. The Afridi—his cherished *jezail* in one hand, a heavy fighting-knife in the other—instinctively staggered for an instant to find his feet. Then he charged to make a double slaughtering.

As he charged Nolan fired, shooting with one hand.

The Afridi turned a complete somersault and lay in front of their coveted haven, a corpse.

Salter said nothing, but started on his run again, cleared the body of the dead hillman at a bound, and set Nolan down tenderly, with his back against the inner wall of rock.

"Keep on shooting, for the love of 'eavin, sawgeant!" he exhorted. "This is a little bit of all right, his nobs coming tumbling down this way, with a bright and saucy new puggaree on his nut!"

He pointed to the unusually clean puggaree, or turban, which had fallen from the head of the dead Afridi.

"It will do to tie up that cronky leg of

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yours, sawgeant," he explained, "and to 'old in what's left of my brains and my beauty teeth!"

He limped out and snatched up the puggaree. Tearing off a couple of yards, he wound it around his head and chin and jaw, covering the topless brim of his helmet with it like a muffler.

"They've hit me in the jaw, too!" he added, gobbling his words, but in the tones of one who theorizes on the weather of tomorrow. "It was a Lee-Metford bullet done it too, or it would have tore the whole mouth off me. That's what made me jib outside there when the duck let off his blunderbuss. Some pal of his copped me in the cheek, an' I just had to spit out them teeth or swallow them. If it wasn't my mouth was open, I'd have got hurt!"

Nolan looked at the giant curiously.

He saw there was a hole in his right cheek, as well as blood all over his face.

"Tare and ages, me son!" said Nolan. "But 'tis yourself is the makings of a sodger and a man!"

Then, with Salter's assistance, he bound up his wounded leg as best the nature of the circumstances would allow.

THE nook in which the two men lay was remarkably well secluded; and the hillmen, in any case, were too busily absorbed in their endeavors to annihilate the party in the *sangar* to bother about a couple of wounded soldiers somewhere apart from the rest, who could be captured and cut up at everybody's leisure. The operation of binding Nolan's leg, therefore, proceeded peacefully, punctuated only by the grunts and curses of Nolan himself and the cheery assurances of Salter.

"You're all right, sawgeant! What's a little 'ole in the blooming 'ip? It's me as has got the blinking knock with the top of my 'ead tored away, and me brains being cooked alive in the brim of my 'elmet!"

Unable to find words of sympathy adequate for so frightful an injury, and realizing to the full how willingly Salter had knuckled down to save a comrade's life at a moment when he was being cursed by that comrade for cowardice, Nolan could attempt no blarney. He felt that both he and Salter were already as good as dead, and he was angry with himself for having at any time under-rated the private's bravery.

Meanwhile Salter looked out at the *sangar*. He had rolled a few rocks as a breastwork into the front of their little shelter, and for the time being felt as safe as a bank.

"They're knocking spots off our fellows, sawgeant," said he. "We got to try and help!"

Nolan, leaning back against the rocks, was endeavoring not to hum aloud the air of a ribald song which the circumstances had brought vividly to his mind. Salter's suggestion roused him again. He looked over at the *sangar* with the comprehending eye of the seasoned soldier. It still had its garrison, but that garrison was becoming perilously shattered and weak.

From their sequestered point of vantage the two isolated men could observe that the brunt of the attack was being directed upon the doomed defenders from a point above and behind the nook wherein they themselves were hiding. But other parties of the assailants were working out and around on both sides of the *sangar*, as a prelude to rushing the breastwork whenever the defense became sufficiently slack to justify a charge.

Salter was a crack marksman. The sergeant also was a good shot.

"If we waste no powder, me son," said the latter, "and can pick off them natives closing in on the *sangar* from the sides, our chaps will be able to hang on for half the day yet!"

Salter agreed, and started with feverish alacrity the good work of picking off, one by one, the leaders of the would-be charging-party.

Prayer, he realized, was now out of the question. All he could do was fight and forget the yawning peril of the hereafter, fight like glory-oh and forget everything else, while his exposed brains steadily shriveled him into the shadows of eternal oblivion.

"Right-O, sawgeant!" he answered cheerily. "Here goes!"

The blood from his face smeared the hot stock of his rifle as he leaned his cheek to it and fired. Then a gleam of ecstasy lit up his colorless eyes.

A drab figure, with black tips to it, detached itself from a boulder and went bumping and tumbling down the rocks to the right of the *sangar*. The leader of the attack on that side was out of action for good.

Again and again Salter fired—each time with the quick but careful aim of the first-

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class marksman, each time grinning more joyously through his mask of red, and rippling out quiet little chuckles of laughter.

Nolan, balancing the barrel of his rifle along a rock, also shot swiftly and well. The cordite was smokeless. The cracks of their Lee-Metfords were practically inaudible in the tumult of heavier fire; and the eager tribesmen who were worming themselves into a position to rush the *sangar* were picked off, one by one, and perished without realizing whence they were being shot.

AN HOUR went by.

The *sangar* was still inviolate, but not half a dozen of its defenders could stand up to shoot.

Another hour passed.

Salter glanced warily at the grim face of Nolan. The Irishman pretended not to notice the glance; but he saw it. He knew what it meant. It was a matter which neither man cared to mention.

Their ammunition was nearly all expended.

From somewhere directly above their heads came the raucous war-shout of an Afridi, and the deafening reports of two *jezails*.

"We're going to get nobbed, Salter, me bhoy!" warned Nolan.

"Nobbed nothing!" snorted Salter. "I'll give 'em the blinking prong before they nobs me, sawgeant! Gorblimey, sawgeant! I'll give 'em the prong till I drops!"

Salter glared at Nolan from his pale, watery eyes as if courting contradiction.

"Gorblimey, sawgeant!" he repeated. "Wot do I care? I'm a blinking goner! Me brains is stripped! They've got me number! Wot do I care?"

Whipping the bayonet from his belt, he clicked it on to the muzzle of his rifle. Then he jerked back his head as a bullet from Nolan's gun snapped past his ear.

The head and shoulders of a hillman that had protruded for an instant from the side of a boulder not ten paces off, slithered slowly out of sight again with the nonchalant ease of motion peculiar to the freshly dead.

Simultaneously three shadows flopped through the air from overhead—three plucky Borderers had jumped bodily from the arch of rock to Salter's improvised breastwork, and had bounded thence into his shallow sanctuary.

Salter clenched his bleeding jaws in a cackle of triumphant laughter.

"Fried alive!" he repeated mechanically, voicing the thought uppermost in his brain. "Wot do I care?" he added philosophically. "There's the prong! Eat it, you *soor!* Eat it!"

Heaving himself forward, then swaying back again, with the rhythmic impetuosity of a stage haymaker, he pierced the foremost Afridi with the bayonet and swung him up —skewered like a beetle—on the steel.

The point and handle of the side-arm, as well as the barrel of the rifle, had ripped through the hillman's body, and his chest rested on the thumb and forefinger of Salter's clenched fist, five inches back from the muzzle of his rifle.

Still forking the quick load upward and forward, the giant lunged Borderer and blade at the throat of the next assailant.

The red point caught the wretched man directly under the chin and came out through the back of his head.

Then, as the Fusileer heaved the double load across the parapet and strove to shake them from the point, the blade broke off at the stock.

The third Afridi lay dead beside Salter. Nolan had shot him in the face as he jumped to the ground.

Salter kicked the corpse casually, unwittingly. Then he stared blankly at the red muzzle of his rifle and the smashed stock of the bayonet, the point of which still spitted the two dead hillmen he had thrown outside the breastwork. He sobbed in a heart-broken agony of desolateness and despair.

"If I'd the stinking tinker as made the blistering hairpin," he whimpered, "I'd crack his perishing neck! Oh, blimey, but it's hard, sawgeant! Swelp me, but it's perishing hard! No. blinking prong! No——"

"Give that duck behind yez the butt, avick!" broke in Nolan. "Do it quick!"

Another green-eyed and muscular mountaineer was on his knees, leveling a *jezail* at the soldier from the corner of a rock outside their breastwork. As Salter turned the man fired, but the bullet missed its mark. Before the smoke was well clear of the barrel, however, Salter had caught the hillman's weapon with his left hand and, as the hardy fighter clung to the stock, the butt of Salter's rifle cracked through the side of his face and

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head, by the ear, where the folds of his puggaree afforded no protection.

He went down like a felled ox.

The limp had gone out of Salter's leg. He forgot that there was a hole in his cheek, and a tooth or so and a piece of jaw missing. His unhappy brains—held in place by the strip of the dead Afridi's puggaree—seemed to belong in the eternal fitness of things. The withering sunshine of high noon in the Tirah was for him freighted with pleasant airs and the perfume of rare toilet soaps of the fourpenny, as distinguished from the twopenny, kinds.

He ran back to Nolan and patted him affectionately on the back.

"Wot ho, sawgeant!" he chirped. "I had him on the dial that time, fair! Wot do you think?"

As the sergeant nodded his complete concurrence, Salter shook his head disparagingly.

"But it ain't tasty!" he protested. "Wot I like is the prong! Swap rifles and lend us your bayonet, will you, sawgeant? You may say I'm only a haymaking farmer, but wot I says is, 'Give me the prong!' "

Nolan shook his head sadly. He was a sergeant. His bayonet was a sergeant's sword. It could not be used prong-fashion.

"I'm afeared we do be finished wid prongs—you and me, Salter, me son!" said he, relapsing into the broad brogue of his native pastures.

"But yez done it well whin yez had it, son," he went on. "And 'tis proud I am—and proud the Captain beyant will be—that there was a man wid such a heft to him in the Rigimint!"

He surveyed Salter with the calm ecstasy of a connoisseur whose judgment is not ill formed nor hasty, but is thorough and deep.

"Them piratical natives, too!" he added. "They'll be talking of it for years after they've cut the lights out of us—they will, that same!"

SALTER'S jaw sagged with disappointment. All hope of a saint-like deathbed being dispersed, he should have wished to carry on and die berserk, with a bayonet-topped gun in his fist, forgetful of torn brains and all other torments of the living. Now, alas! That small ambition was crushed. He must stand by and get shot or stabbed like a helpless cow, denied the last joy in the life of a soldier.

"I've only the one clip left, sawgeant!" said he, holding up the steel-headed strip of cartridges.

Nolan nodded amicably. He had been waiting the announcement for some time.

"But the *soors* ain't crawling down by the *sangar* no more!" continued the private. "They got the hump about something, or are coming down behind to do us two in first."

Nolan peered out toward the *sangar*.

The tribesmen who had been creeping down on either flank, with the object of rushing its defenses, had seemingly wearied of Salter's desolating fire and determined to change their tactics.

That side of the pass was bare of the enemy. But as the few survivors in the *sangar*—there appeared to be only three rifles left—were popping an occasional shot at the ridge above and behind their little shelter, Nolan assumed that the hillmen were sneaking down under cover of the rocks to finish up Salter and himself before annihilating Captain Cruikshank and the Captain's party.

"True for yez, me lad!" said he to Salter. "They do be going to do us in, sure enough!"

His gray eyes again scanned the semi-silent shambles of the *sangar*.

"Eh, begobs, Salter, me son!" he exclaimed. "Stand up!"

Salter turned on him petulantly.

"Lord 'elp us!" he protested. "Ain't I standing up?"

Nolan groaned as one who deplored the folly of all mankind.

"Stand up proper, ye half-baked rooky!" he gasped. "Can't yez see 'tis the Captain? 'Tis hard hit he do be; but he's thrying to tell yez that ye're a sportsman and a good shot, and a credit to meself and the Rigimint! Stand up, avick! 'Tis your last chanct. Port arms an' give him a gin'ral's salute, and show him ye're a man and a sodger!"

Raising himself gingerly above the breastwork of the doomed *sangar*, a man with an eye-glass staggered upright for an instant, waved a sword feebly, and sank back out of sight.

Salter, bracing himself stoutly, straight as a ramrod, brought up his gory rifle to the salute.

"GREAT SCOTT, Major! It's one of Cruikshank's lot—thinks he's saluting the Colors. Off his bally chump, poor chap!"

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The voice came from the boulder over Salter's head, whence aforetime jumped the Afridis he had "pronged" to Paradise.

A blond-bearded face peered down at him.

"Hey there, you men!" called the owner of the beard. "Who are you? Are you both hurt?"

Salter gasped upward, dazed and helpless, and gabbled out something like—

"All ri', sir!"

Then, calmly subsiding upon a rock, he sat down in the presence of his superior officer.

"All ri', sir!" he again muttered irrelevantly. "Me brains is fried alive!"

It was Nolan who sang out the proper and respectful answer.

"Southshire Fusileers, sir!" said he. "Sergeant Nolan and Private Salter. Both hit, sir—Private Salter bad. Captain Cruikshank and the rest of the picket are in the *sangar* across the pass, sir. I'm afraid they do be in a bad way."

A stream of soldiers came scampering down the hill—the stretcher-men running for the *sangar*.

"WELL, my man!" said the Surgeon-Colonel genially, as he stood over Salter in the hospital tent. "So you're Salter! Heard all about you from Captain Cruikshank and Sergeant Nolan. Saucy sort of top-knot you've got! First-aid field dressing taken from the enemy, isn't it? Well, we've got to patch up that jaw of yours anyhow and put a plug in that dimple before they come around to you with a sergeant's stripes or a V. C., or any of that sort of thing. Eh?"

Private Salter shook his puggaree-bandaged head.

"It's no use, sir," he moaned deferentially. "It's me brains is gone! Took the lid clean orf me head, sir, they did! I'm booked!"

The Colonel sucked in his breath. The two Doctor-Captains looked at the doomed man sorrowfully. Field-surgery does not yet admit of new skulls being adjusted to the living subject. Not at any point nearer than the Base Hospital anyway; and this was among the remotest hills of the Tirah.

"Nonsense, man!" said the Colonel. "We'll patch you up while you wait! Can't afford to ruin our reputations by letting a man with a little thing like a cracked crown die on our hands! Sit down, now! We won't hurt you!"

Deftly, gently as a woman, he unwrapped the blood-soaked strip of the dead Afridi's puggaree and carefully examined Salter's wound.

"The sponge, Fletcher, please; and the scissors!"

Salter could hear the request with hideous distinctness. He could see Fletcher handing the scissors to the Colonel. He wondered if he would ever see or hear anything again, or if the scissors would clip out forever his sense of the existing world.

Then—awfully, frightfully, mocking him with an unimaginable mockery—the voice of Fletcher, magnified a thousandfold by Salter's straining ears, was raised in a lilt of indescribably callous ribaldry. The Captain was humming that erstwhile popular melody, "A Little Bit off the Top"!

"Now we'll look at that jaw!" said the Colonel. "That scratch on your scalp may smart a bit, but it's not bone-deep—might have been done by your best girl's hairpin. Your skull is sound as a nut!"

Salter sprang to his feet.

"Me brains!" he shrieked.

Captain Fletcher grabbed him by one arm and held him in a grip like a vise. The other Captain caught his other arm.

"Sit down!" rasped the Colonel. "And let me plug up that hole in your cheek for you, or I'll put you under arrest!"

Salter sank back on the medicine-chest and stared blankly at the Colonel.

"Me brains!" he repeated plaintively. "Gorblimey, sir! They're fried alive!"

The Colonel rapped with firm white knuckles on the top of Salter's head.

"Brains!" he ejaculated testily. "Why, how do you think brains could get fried under a thatch like that? Your head is solid bone throughout, my lad—solid bone throughout!"

Salter blinked up at the laughing face of the Colonel.

No, the Colonel was not mocking him.

The giant buried his wounded face in his hands and boo-hooed like a babe.

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The Man Trail

A Four-Part Story

Part II

by Henry Oyen

Author of "The Snow Burner"

SYNOPSIS—Hating business and liking the out-of-doors, a failure in the eyes of his rich father, *John Peabody*, big-muscled and twenty, takes a position with his uncle, *"Wolf John" Peabody*, a grim old lumber-king of the North woods. Arrived at Peabody Point, *John* receives a cordial welcome from his uncle's adopted daughter *Belle*, but from *Wolf John* only the gruff information that he must work or starve; that his name thenceforth will be *Jack Mud*, not *Peabody;* and that foreman *Bull Bart* will break him in at Main Camp.

Thinking *John* has found favor in *Belle's* eyes, *Bull Bart* determines to break his spirit and therefore makes him sawing-partner with champion-sawyer *Norby*. But the latter takes a liking to the newcomer and helps him bear the strain of those first back-breaking days.

John learns they are about to move camp to the King Pines, a primeval tract held on a one-year lease by *Wolf John*, but desired by his rival *Lowrey* and the Lumber Trust. A timber war is predicted, with the disreputable gang at Whisky Landing siding with the Trust. *Norby* hints at *Bull Bart's* desire to wed *Belle* and inherit the Peabody interests, and *John's* blood starts boiling.

CHAPTER IX

BIG CHARLEY

AFTER breakfast next morning, Bart came up to John as he was preparing to go with Norby into the woods and said—

"Here you, Mud; you'll work with Big Charley today."

A scowling, red-faced giant standing near by grunted derisively.

"Mud! Ho! Dat's fonny name. Mud! Ho! Aye tenk mebbe his name be Dennis baffore night ef he go'n' pull saw widt me."

John looked his new working-partner over. The man must have stood six feet six in his rubbers. His arms, with hands unnaturally large, hung from his shoulders like the thick branches of some huge tree. A straggling yellow mustache hid a sneering mouth, little greenish pig-eyes gleamed bloodshot from the puffy face; and his breath, poisonous with bad whisky, eloquently explained the puffiness.

"Come on, yew little Mud faller," he snarled, glaring maliciously at John. "I ain't feel so well diss morning. I pull your arms out of deh socket."

The next five hours were a nightmare to John. Before fifteen minutes had gone by he realized that Big Charley was suffering from the effects of a visit to Whisky Falls, and that he was working off his grouch on his new partner. There was no way in which the giant did not force John to betray his inexperience, no possible fashion in which he did not seek to make John cry enough.

At first John laid it all to the man's liquor sickness, but as the morning wore on he began to sense that there was a definite

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purpose behind Big Charley's words and actions. It was only after he had leaped luckily away from the spot where Charley had told him to stand, and avoided the downward plunge of a falling limb, and had dodged a wedge which the giant had carelessly tossed at his head, that he understood. Big Charley was out to get him hurt. Apparently it didn't make any difference how it was done, or how serious the damage. In his pretended rush-work Big Charley was taking every opportunity that might appear accidental to send John back to camp broken or crippled.

John said nothing. For the rest of the morning he kept himself alert, and Big Charley's efforts all went in vain. By noon he knew that it would be impossible for him to continue as Charley's partner, and as he followed the sullen giant toward camp for the noon meal he debated with himself the course to pursue. He could not go to Bart and complain; Bart would have him laughed out of camp. If he refused to work with Charley, something of the same sort undoubtedly would happen. In either event Bart would have marked him as a weakling and failure.

On the other hand, if he stuck it out Big Charley inevitably would find an opportunity when John was off his guard to do him the desired damage. He was still pondering when a voice hailed him from behind a stump near the camp clearing and old Nels, the tote-teamster, was beckoning to him slyly.

"How'd you make it?" asked the little man anxiously.

John told him of his experiences of the morning.

"Sure. You got to look out for him; he's a bad one. He'll put you on the bum if he can. I tried to tell you this morning when you started out, but I didn't have the chance."

John looked at the old man gratefully. Small, almost gnome-like, Nels was of body, but in his mild blue eyes gleamed the light of a big spirit.

"What can I do about it?" begged John. "I can't quit him. I can't kick. What can I do?"

The old blue eyes ran over John's frame, over his jaw, and up to his eyes appraisingly.

"How are you with your mitts?" said Nels suddenly.

"What?"

"And your nerve? Got any backbone?"

"What are you driving at, Nels?"

"I'm just dropping a hint, boy," said Nels. "It's for you to take it up, if you got the nerve. Big Charley's so big that he's got the whole camp bluffed; they're afraid to talk cross to him. Well, I saw the time when Bart tamed him. A square fist-fight alone in the woods. Charley's wind's gone—gone completely. Bart jumped him hard at the go-off and put him down. Then he stayed away from him a few minutes and let Charley wind himself; and after that he walked in an' Charley wasn't any harder to handle than a sack of oats. Just a hint; you do what you please about it. There he is now; he's waiting to show you up before the whole camp. That's his way."

THEY were in the camp clearing now, and Big Charley stood in front of a group of men before the bunk-house. As John came within hearing he roared derisively:

"Boyss, dere's deh poorest excuse for a man vot ever come into diss camp. He aindt got backbone 'nough for a baby. He yumps when a limb falls widdin ten rod of him. He's a high-banker, he iss."

It was the camp bully's usual way of humiliating a man, and the men stopped and grinned expectantly. The retort came with a swiftness that surprised them all. John had gauged the distance and leaped forward as the last words left Charley's lips.

His arms caught the long legs at the knee in a perfect low tackle. Charley fell like a tree, and before he could rise, cursing and roaring to his feet, John was free and standing alert and ready for battle.

Big Charley rushed. John side-stepped. The giant rushed again. John repeated his tactics. After five minutes of this Big Charley began to pant. John began to breathe easily again, for he saw that the man already was whipped.

When chance offered he stepped in with his weight behind a blow to the solar plexus. Big Charley sank to his knees, his face white, his hands pressed to his middle.

The men, at first amazed, were now roaring with laughter. Never had a camp bully made such a miserable showing. Suddenly the men began to scatter. Out of the little office at one end of the bunk-house Bart

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came springing with set jaw and flashing eyes. He went straight to Charley. The big man was staggering to his feet. With a blow to the jaw Bart stretched him on the ground and kicked him dispassionately.

"Come and get your time when you're able," he said calmly. "Your bluff has been called, so you're through. The men know now that you're nothing but a bum." He turned on John. "Come into the office Mud; I want to see you."

In the office John saw a sickly looking youth sitting on the floor in one corner, weeping piteously. The youth had a black eye, and his lips were cut and swollen. At the sight of him Bart paused and cursed venomously for a full minute.

"That was my clerk," he explained to John. "Hired him last week, and here what does he do but fall sick with typhoid fever and have to go away. Ahh! If I wasn't busy I'd bat the head right off his shoulders instead of barely marking him. You're going to take his place, Mud. You're no good with the saw. Go and get your dinner. Then come back here and this poor louse will break you in."

He strode to the door, stopped and turned around.

"I suppose you think that you're fairly handy with your fists, Mud. Well, I do all the fist-slinging that's done in this camp. Remember that."

During that afternoon, as he took up the simple duties of the little office, John alternately laughed and grumbled.

"Fate's against me!" he ruminated, as he saw the fever-stricken clerk driven back to Peabody Point and knew that he was left in sole charge of the camp's clerical work. "I got shipped from the city because I couldn't stand the office, and here I'm dumped into one—in the woods! And Bart beat up that poor sick kid! Now I wonder if Bart is going to be worse than Babson?"

In the next few days he discovered that Bart had little time to spend in the office. The man was driving-power incarnate. In the first graying of dawn the teamsters, tumbling sleepily out to feed their horses, found him standing at the stable door, his pale, malignant face reminding them of what might happen if they were late. At midnight the tote-teamster, coming to camp with a load of provisions, found Bart waiting to demand news from his superior, Wolf John. During the daytime he was everywhere, saying little, his mere presence serving to keep the men keyed up to the highest tension.

"And when he sleeps Heaven only knows," said Nels, the old tote-teamster, who had become friendly with John. "There are some that says most every night he walks six miles up to Whisky Falls and back when the camp is asleep. There's women up there; he is a devil with women."

CHAPTER X

THE CODE OF THE WOODS

FROM that day John went about his duties with new seriousness and care. He had come into contact with the great game for power, wealth and women as strong men play it when they are beyond the haltering bounds of law, and he saw that in such a game no thoughtless, larking boy might take a hand. As he had determined to play, he resolved to play to the best of his ability, and as he recognized his vast inexperience in such a game he humbly set himself to learn as rapidly as he could.

To get near to Bart, to understand the man's character, to win his confidence if possible, seemed to John the best road to learning what part he should play in the big game. He had seen enough of the man to appreciate that to accomplish successfully the first step in this process he must above all perform efficiently and faithfully the distasteful clerical work assigned to him. Hence it would have delighted his father to behold the humble, conscientious manner in which John proceeded to fulfil his post as clerk to Main Camp.

The work in itself was simple and light; but the previous clerk, probably in the days when the fever was beginning to trouble him, had succeeded in involving his accounts in a most unbusinesslike tangle. This tangle John set himself to clear up, at the same time keeping each day's work up to the minute. For several days he worked far into the night, the light in the little office gleaming out upon the snow long after the rest of the camp was abed.

Bart seldom appeared in the office, and then only for a few seconds at a time, but John knew that his night work was not going unobserved. On the fifth night after taking over the office the tangle was cleared

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up and John, sitting down to light his pipe and regard his completed work with considerable satisfaction, looked up and saw the silent-footed Bart standing in the doorway.

"What are you doing; plugging for a raise?" asked the foreman suspiciously.

John shook his head.

"No; but I don't like to work with poor tools," he replied. "Things were pretty well balled up here; I've been straightening them out. Look at this."

With a zeal that was as much genuine as it was assumed he proceeded to demonstrate the changes which he had wrought in the camp's system of accounts. Bart, looking on carelessly, asked half a dozen short questions, each one of which went straight to the heart of the matter in hand.

"You're a good clerk, Mud," he said with a trace of contempt in his tone when the explanation was finished.

He picked up a ledger and stood studying the rows of accounts and figures in John's neat handwriting. Suddenly he chucked the book away, turned around and flung himself into a chair.

"I s'pose you think you're through with Big Charley, eh, Mud? Well, you ain't. He's up at Whisky Falls, and he sends word if you ever show up there he'll tear you to pieces. Says he knows you're afraid to come up there, though. Well, I guess he's right, ain't he, Mud? You know you were lucky in getting away with him when he was under the weather; you're too wise to risk yourself in tough company away from camp, ain't you, Mud? You bet. *Mud!* Ha, ha!"

With a sneer which cut John to the quick, he swung silently out of the door and was gone. No crunch-crunch of his rubbers on the snow came back from the silence of the night. The man moved like a wildcat, as silently as he moved swiftly.

John sat and smoked alone for a long time before he went to bed that night. Nels, the old teamster, was partly right at least: Bart certainly was the sort of man who would do anything to further his own advantage. But why had he taunted John with Big Charley's boast from Whisky Falls? Was this part of the process by which Bart was to discover whether there was any "iron" in him, as his uncle had put it? Did Bart want him to go to Whisky Falls? Or was it merely said to make him feel small?

NEXT morning, while John was checking up a load of provisions for the kitchen, he overheard his name spoken by the fat cook in conversation with the cookee. The men spoke with unnecessary loudness, obviously for his benefit.

"Naw," said the cook contemptuously, "he ain't no man; he's only fit to keep books and hug the stove. He don't travel with the he-men, that Mud don't."

"But he cleaned up the Big Swede, didn't he?" came the young cookee's suggestion.

"Ah, cleaned him up!" The cook laughed. "Didn't you see what Charley was playing for? To make the guy think he had a cinch. Then Charley was going to clean him right; but Bart seen it and comes running out and stopped it. Big Charley sends word from the Falls that he's laying for this Mud, but there ain't no danger Mud showing up there. Somebody'll give him the news that Big Charley's staying there and he'll keep away, see'f he don't. Naw, that big stiff's nothing but a bookkeeper, he is. He ain't no man 'tall."

Later in the day, Lavin, the old stableman, coming into the office for a requisition for feed, smiled at John significantly.

"Ain't going up to Whisky Falls Sat'day night, I s'pose, be you, young fellow?" he asked.

John replied that he hadn't thought of going.

The stableman laughed.

"No, I guess not. You won't be going up to the Falls so long as Big Charley's hanging 'round there, I'll bet on that."

He went out laughing, leaving John more deeply puzzled.

At the evening meal the taunting continued.

One lumber-jack called across the long table to another.

"Hey Pete, you goin' to Whisky Falls this Sat'day?"

The man addressed instantly simulated great fright.

"I should say not," he stammered. "Big Charley's up there. I'm afraid to go away from camp and get hurt."

The table roared with laughter and John's wonderment grew. After supper he sought out old Nels for an explanation. The old man nodded as John related all that had been said by Bart and others about Big Charley.

"Bart dropped a hint that set the boys

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up to it," he said. "It's camp sport; seeing how much you will take. Big Charley is up there, too."

"But there's no sense to it," John protested. "Surely Bart doesn't want me to go to Whisky Falls to fight that poor soak again?"

Nels rubbed his chin slowly.

"It's this way," he expalined. "You're a new man in the bush and they're trying you out. That little fuss before the cook-house, you know; well, that showed you wanted to be classed as a fighting man, and the boys are trying to find out if you are the real thing. If you'd took Big Charley's lip and said nothing you wouldn't have been bothered. Then you'd have showed you didn't want to be thought of as a fighting man. But now you got to show 'em or they'll make life miserable for you."

"You don't mean I'll have to go up there and get into another row with that sot?"

Nels looked up, his eyes puckering suspiciously.

"You ain't afraid, are you? If you are——"

"Afraid!" cried John. "Is that what they want to know? All right. I'll show 'em."

"It's best," said Nels seriously. "I'll go with you. If you didn't go you wouldn't have any standing with the boys, you know, and then when the pinch comes you wouldn't be in any fix to do much to help Wolf John."

A week before John would have laughed at the whole affair. But now he understood that in the woods standards differ from those in the city. If he refused to go to Whisky Falls he would be pointed out as a thing to condemn, a man afraid. It was a test, and, silly as it was, he knew he must meet it if he was to make good.

WHEN Saturday came the men knocked off work at 3:30, an hour before their usual quitting time, which was when the short December day ended abruptly in darkness. More than forty of them as they came into camp made their way directly to the office. John sat at the desk, a check-book before him, pen in hand. Bart sat at his side. As each man entered, the foreman spoke sharply—

"How much?"

The man addressed invariably cleared his throat and shuffled nervously.

"If you could do it, Mr. Bart, I'd like to draw about ten dollars."

"Give it to him, Mud."

Some of them boldly asked for as much as twenty, knowing that they had much more than that due them.

"Give him ten," snapped Bart, and the wealthy ones accepted the reduction humbly. "Ten is plenty whisky money for any man."

When the last man had drawn his check Bart turned to John. "Going with the crew tonight, Mud?"

"Where are they going?"

Bart sneered.

"You are green, Mud. What do you s'pose lumber-jacks draw money for—to go to church with? Those fools are going up to Whisky Falls to shoot in their money, but seeing as Big Charley is still up there you'd better stick to camp and play dominoes with cookee."

"Perhaps," laughed John, "but as I've decided to go up to Whisky Falls and see my friend Charley, cookee will have to find somebody else to play with."

A cutter and single horse came driving up to the office door and Bart stepped in and took the reins.

"I'd like to go up and see that you don't get too badly hurt to keep books, Mud," he laughed as he started off. "But I can't—I've got a date with the boss and his family down at Peabody Point."

He gave a shake to the lines, the horse broke into a trot, and John was left staring after him with a strange feeling rendering him uncomfortable. He felt that he ought to go to Peabody Point instead of Whisky Falls.

CHAPTER XI

WHISKY FALLS

THE evening meal at Main Camp was a hurried, excited affair that Saturday evening. The men who had drawn money gulped down their food, flung on their caps and set out in groups for Whisky Falls, driven with the craving for excitement which was more compelling than the mere want of food.

They walked swiftly and lightly, their heads held high, their eyes bright, eagerly anticipating the searing pleasures that lay before them. It was for this that they

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labored all the week, risking bones and even life to earn the wherewithal to risk health, reason and life dabbling with the poisons of their place of play.

In bodily perfection and nobility of stature these woodsmen probably averaged as well as any similar body of white men to be found in the world; but their souls were the souls of boys in the barbaric age, eager only for today's play, unthinking of the morrow.

Old Nels came for John after most of the men had left. In his belt under his mackinaw were stuck two short, heavy-caliber revolvers.

"I take these along to be sure," he said, buttoning the coat over them. "You don't take anything. Sometimes things get pretty rough at the Falls and I ain't going to let them put us out of business."

"Nels," said John skeptically, "are you trying to scare me, too?"

The old man gave him a look of disapproval.

"You wait and see," he muttered. "Come on now; it's a bad business; let's have it over as soon as we can."

In spite of his age and his short legs Nels led the way out of camp at a woodsman's stride that it taxed the younger man to follow. At times the ridiculous phase of the situation smote John and he laughed aloud. Nels pursued his way grimly, not even pausing to turn around to inquire the reason for his companion's merriment.

After an hour's walk the trail dipped into a ravine and from then on followed the river bed, a mere path on a ledge of rock. The trees here were of a size to inspire in John a feeling of awe, and he judged rightly that they were in the forest which he had heard called King Pines. Suddenly in the solemn stillness of the woods came the rumble of falling water, though the river itself was covered with a sheet of ice. A moment later John found himself mounting a rise on to a plateau, and there before his eyes he saw gleaming through the timber the lights of their destination, Whisky Falls.

There were perhaps half a dozen one-story log buildings of various sizes. They stood side by side facing the falls which tumbled down a slit in the plateau, and the windows of each of them were bright with light. Men passed to and fro before these lights, singing, shouting, staggering. Occasionally a door opened and from within came a medly of laughter, music, shouting, and, what sounded like blasphemy in the great woods, the shrill sounds of maudlin women's voices. John sickened.

"Hold on, Nels," he called. "I don't care for this at all."

"No, no," growled the old man. "I don't care for it, but it's got to be done. You stay here; I'll go ahead and see where Charley is."

He was gone possibly ten minutes when he returned and said briefly—

"Come on."

He led the way straight to the largest building in the row and entered, closely followed by John. The building consisted of one large room, generously lighted with hanging oil lamps. A long bar ran along one side of the room. Along the other were ranged gambling games varying from a craps-table near at hand to the roulette-wheel in the far corner.

On a raised platform at the end of the room, veiled in a cloud of vile tobacco smoke, sat a squat, broad Chinaman, his face like a mask, his narrowed eyes watching all things in the room with the keenness of a hawk. He was in his shirt sleeves and—the right sleeve of his carefully laundered white shirt dangling empty at his side.

"Is that Wah Song?" whispered John.

Nels nodded and John stood and stared. The mere appearance of a Chinaman in the room was out of place; but this figure, better dressed than any other man there, sitting motionless upon the raised perch, seemed to dominate the place like some weird idol of evil. The slit-like eyes in the broad, flat face were constantly upon the three bartenders as they made change behind the bar, upon the faro-dealer as he pulled the cards from the box, upon the roulette man as he whined his siren song and spun the ball, and upon the fifty woodsmen who milled and danced, laughed, shouted, cursed and quarreled in the middle of the big room. Beside him, close to his left hand, stood a sawed-off shotgun.

John stood and stared on until there came a cry from Nels—

"Look out!"

A blow from behind stretched him flat on the floor, a weight fell upon him, and he was rolling on the floor in the grip of Big Charley fighting furiously to get the upper hold.

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THOUGH the blow had been struck foully, not a man moved to interfere. This was the game as it was played in the woods; the man who won was acclaimed victor no matter what means he used to win. Even Nels stood silent and looked on. It was the bookkeeper's fight. He should have kept his eyes open once he had entered the enemy's ground.

After the first furious onslaught John's wits began to clear. He was not hurt, and he knew he could outlast his assailant. He worked until his left arm suddenly clipped his foe's neck in chancery. With all his might he gripped and hung on. Presently his right arm, too, was free and his hand flew around Big Charley's head and, gripping the huge, fat jaw, began to twist.

It was a deadly hold. Slowly the bull neck of the giant began to give. His huge hands tore in vain to loose the hold. Slowly, cruelly John twisted the head around until human flesh and bone could stand no more. A gasping, choking sound came from the bully's throat.

"Holler 'nough!" cried Nels. "Make him holler 'nough!"

"Don't do it, Charley!" cried several of the big man's partisans. "Don't do it!"

But Charley was whipped. His eyes were starting from his head and the blood was drumming in his ears.

" 'Nough!" he gurgled. The room rang with a mighty shout, cruel derision for the vanquished mingling with acclaim for the man who won.

John suddenly rolled the great bulk from him and sprang to his feet. He was panting and trembling from exertion, but Charley lay on the floor flat on his back, painfully gasping back the life that had nearly been choked from him.

And now the men from Main Camp pressed around to hail their champion.

"Squeezed him, just squeezed the fight right out of him! Pulled the head off his shoulders! Whee-yow! What a grip! Eh, you bookkeeper! Hats off to you. Line up, boys, line up! Come on, Mud! Drink your head off on me! Fightin' man—fightin' man of Main Camp! Who wants to stack their man up against ours? Come on, Mud, drink."

John's blood was up. He was sickened by the whole affair. These same men had pestered him into a row against his wishes. They would have jeered him out of camp had he been beaten. They would have stood by and let Charley beat him to a pulp.

"No, I'm not drinking with any of you," he said, and old Nels started at the tone of his voice. "I'm not going to stay here another minute. I came up here just to show you that you were wrong about me. You had a lot of fun with me this week. You're not going to have any more fun with me next week. And any man who thinks I can't make that good can step out right now and settle the question."

Not a man moved. It was not that they were afraid; there were men in that crew who would have stepped forth and tackled the dark fiend himself had he offered battle. But the coldness of John's nerve had won them. They saw that he meant it; that he was ready to battle one or all of them rather than take back one word that he had uttered. They knew nerve when they saw it, these men. For a moment they stared at him in silence. Nels quietly unbuckled the belt of his mackinaw. Then:

"Whee-yow! Three cheers for the bookkeeper of Main Camp—even if he won't drink with us. Hip, hip, hoo-ray!"

They were still cheering when John and Nels left the room.

Up on his perch Wah Song's eyes narrowed further as he leaned over and whispered to the man at the roulette-wheel:

"Who dlat man, eh? Clelk at Mlain Camp, eh? U-u-um-m-m. Fightee like hell; tlakee like Bull heself; no drinkee. Clelk—hell! Him blig man you watchee see. I tellee Bull better watch out."

CHAPTER XII

BART GROWLS

THE three weeks between the date of John's arrival at Main Camp and Christmas passed without further adventure. John performed his duties as camp-clerk quietly and efficiently. During his spare hours he and Nels, the camp-hunter, and the cookee, a red-haired young imp called Dugan, hunted deer and moose for camp provender. For each deer that they brought in Bart allowed five dollars to be credited to their wage account, for a moose the allowance was fifteen dollars. John, having charge of the books, credited his loot to Nels.

There was no closed season for the woods-

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man, John found, and the deer were plentiful. John had had much hunting experience of various sorts, but he was the veriest tyro compared to old Nels and to the youthful, woods-bred Dugan. Dugan could discover the whereabouts of deer with all but the certainty of a trained hound; and whenever the roar of Nels' old 45-90 shattered the Winter silence John left his run-way and went straight toward the sound, knowing positively that the quarry was down.

The old man's skill with the rifle was uncanny. Once in a slashing Dugan, John and Nels, walking side by side, rifles on their shoulders, jumped two bucks and a doe at two hundred yards. Nels fired three shots before either of his companions could get into action and each shot laid a deer dead in its tracks. Even the sophisticated Dugan gasped.

"Whew!" he whistled. "I wouldn't want to get into a shooting scrape with you, old timer. You didn't even put the butt to your shoulder!"

Since the affair at Whisky Falls the men had treated John with a remarkable degree of respect. Added to this his natural good humor, his ability to pick tunes out of an old guitar which one of the men owned, and to sing excellently more songs than the woodsmen ever dreamed existed, helped to make him popular.

By the time Christmas came around most of the men who at first were inclined to be hostile to him were friendly to a degree. Bart, on the other hand, made no effort to conceal the fact that his attitude toward John had changed soon after the night at the Falls. Hitherto he had treated John with a certain degree of contempt, ridiculing him at the slightest opportunity. Now he plainly showed that he regarded John with suspicion. He no longer indulged in tight-lipped jests at his clerk's expense, and twice John swung suddenly around to find the foreman studying him suspiciously.

On the morning of Christmas Eve the explosion came. John had been busy all the morning and half the night before preparing the pay-roll and drawing checks for such of the men as planned to leave camp for the holidays. He had completed his task, placed the books in the office and, whistling merrily, turned about to find the silent-footed foreman leaning over the desk, eying him malevolently.

Bart's face was thrust close to John's, his long jaw was thrust wickedly forward, and the lips above them were drawn in out of sight. And once more John thought of prison pallor as he looked at Bart's pale face.

The foreman moved until he was fairly over John. His hand was behind him on his hip where he always carried a revolver.

"Mud," he drawled with a lowering of eyelids, "who are you, what are you, and what do you want in this camp?"

It was the first time in his life that John looked into a face with murder reeking from it. The face pressed closer; the eyes were directly before his eyes; the jaw was thrust close to his. He recoiled from it as from a maddened beast. For the moment there Bart stood revealed in the most deadly depths in him, and in that flash John's mind formed two pictures: one of Bart smiling and graceful before Belle Peabody, and one of him as he was now.

Then John knew that the inevitable conflict between this man and himself had begun and he slowly took hold of himself and, sitting up straight, looked straight back into Bart's eyes without quivering.

"Why do you ask that, Mr. Bart?" he said quietly.

For a space of seconds the room was deadly with its silence. John fully expected to see Bart's hand come up from the hip with the gun in it; he had braced himself to overturn the desk and leap into battle for his life. He did not take his eyes from Bart's. He felt himself growing stronger than this man with the face of evil, even though he was unarmed. Slowly he leaned forward, thrusting his jaw close to the other man's.

For an instant the balance hung so, the two evenly facing each other, and then—the hand did not come up from the hip with the gun in it. For Bart gave way. He drew back. His eyes wavered. They could not hold up; they turned away.

"—— —— you!" screamed Bart, furiously. "What do you mean by talking to me like that, here in this camp where I'm boss, and you're nothing but a —— clerk? Hah? Whaddayah mean!"

John replied with another question, icily uttered.

"Bart, what are you trying to put over me?"

For the time being the power of speech deserted Bart. He took a step backward; he was uncomfortable before John's eyes, even with the gun on his hip. John, who had

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calculated on the possibilities of getting that gun in one tremendous spring did Bart attempt to bring it into action, came softly around from behind the desk, to keep within reach, and repeated his question.

"What kind of a bluff is it, Bart? You know what I am here. I'm John Mud, I'm your clerk, and I'm trying to learn something about the logging business. Now what kind of a game are you pulling on me with those ugly questions?"

"Game, eh?" Bart had recovered some of his sense of superiority. His thin lips drew apart, tight on the teeth, and he snarled: "You say you're just Jack Mud, you say you're just my clerk, you say you're trying to learn the logging business. I say you're a — liar. You signed for your duds with another name at first, and Old Man Peabody don't invite common clerks down to his house for Christmas dinner; and—look at that!"

He threw at John a scrap of paper which he had crumpled viciously in his hand. John unfolded it and read in his uncle's gigantic scrawl:

BART:

You will let Nels drive the new man Mud down to the Point, to be here by six, Christmas Eve. Let them take the Morgan mare and a cutter. You will stay in camp over the holidays yourself to keep the men in hand. I don't want any burned stables like *last year.* J. P.

"Well," snarled Bart as John looked up, "what have you got to say?"

"Nothing," said John. "Except that I *don't* see what there's in it for you to get so warm about. Mr. Peabody told me when I—when he hired me that I was to be invited to Christmas dinner. I don't see anything for you to jump on me for in that."

Bart swung around, strode to the door, turned back, and glared at him for the space of a full minute.

"Oh, don't you?" he drawled in his most dangerous tone. "Well, I do. Yes indeed, Mr. Mud, I do. And if I were you, Mud, I don't think I'd come back to Main Camp after having Christmas dinner with Mr. Peabody. No, I don't think if I were you, I'd ever come back no matter what you are."

"Why not?"

Bart paused in the doorway, and his lips scarcely moved as he said in a low voice—

"Because after Christmas Main Camp will be awfully unhealthy for anybody using the name of Mud."

SHORTLY after noon Nels came driving up to the office door with a cutter and John stepped in. A light snow had fallen during the night, and the tote-road was covered with fleecy white unmarked by hoof or sleigh-runner. As they went slowly out of camp, the spirited horse danced, sleigh-bells jingling, and the men whom they passed shouted out good-natured greetings and holiday wishes.

"Hey, there, Mud, where you going? Ain't you going to stay in camp and sing for us Christmas? Aw, pshaw! Well, Merry Christmas, boys, Merry Christmas!"

The holiday spirit was in the crisp air, and John warmed at the feeling toward him evinced by these big boy-men. On both sides of the tote-road the pine branches hung covered with soft snow. A bright sun lighted the world. All sound was softened. The horse lifted his head, nostrils extended, in sheer delight at the day, and the two men behind him followed suit.

"By golly!" murmured old Nels, sweeping his arm about in a gesture that embraced all the woods. "It's fine, ain't it, just fine! The woods is the place on a day like this!"

"You bet!" agreed John. "But, say, Nels, what's the matter with Bart?"

The old man indulged in one of his silent chuckles.

"Good joke on him. He had me curry this horse and polish the harness and wash the cutter, for him to drive in to the Point with; and last night Wolf John gives me word for him to stay in camp and to let me drive you in—with the outfit he'd got ready for himself. Could you blame him for being sore? Did he jump on you too?"

John repeated the conversation that had taken place in the office. Nels looked at him sharply and a look of admiration came into his old eyes.

"You faced him down, did you?" He shook his head. "Bull Bart is a hard man to face down. They ain't nobody in these woods been able to give him eye to eye and not quit except Wolf John. You got to keep your eye skinned, now he's served notice on you; but I guess if you spoke a word to the old man he'd make Bart sing a different tune, eh?" he concluded shrewdly.

"I don't see that the old man has got anything to do with it," retorted John. "It's between Bart and myself. I don't understand why he jumped on me in that

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fashion, but I'm certainly not going to run to the old man about it."

They drove in silence for a space.

" 'Member what I told you about Bart sparking up to Belle?" said Nels finally. "That's why he jumped on you."

"But why——"

"She's asked him 'bout you ever' time he's seen her these last three weeks."

A mile passed before another word was spoken. Occasionally Nels glanced sidewise at his companion, but John's set face betrayed in no way how strangely his heart had leaped at this information.

"Going back?" asked Nels.

"Back where?" said John, roused from his dreams.

"To Main Camp."

"Certainly. I couldn't quit now."

"Giddap." The old man set the horse into a trot. "When we get back to camp I'll give you one of my six-guns," he said, "just to make the thing some ways even."

CHAPTER XIII

WHY WOLF JOHN WROTE TO HIS KIN

THE horse trotted steadily on his way; the sleighbells jingled musically. In the west the sun drew nearer and nearer to the black timber-line of the horizon. For a while it seemed to halt there, a great red ball of fire, balanced upon the curtain of night. Then, in a few seconds, it seemed, it slipped down behind the timber.

The world, which a moment before was lighted and warmed by its rays, became gray-dark and cold, as a room in which an open fire suddenly is extinguished. The swift-coming night of the northern Winter was upon them. So lost was John in the new thoughts that Nel's words had opened for him that he started up as from a sleep when Nels pulled up before the big house on the hill at Peabody Point with a gruff:

"Here you are, Mud. Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Nels."

He crossed the wide porch and pressed the bell, a variety of emotions stirring his heart.

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Mud!"

It was Belle herself, standing in the doorway, holding out her hand, beaming at him with those wonderful eyes, smiling at him as if actually glad to see him. It was no mere touch of the fingers that she gave him, but a full, hearty clasp, and John thrilled and stammered his greeting. But he did not release her hand. He held it much longer than was necessary, much longer than was proper; in fact he held it after the greeting had been said, and then, as if suddenly aware of it, he dropped it in much confusion, and they stood for a moment laughing heartily at each other.

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Peabody," stammered John as she ushered him in.

"And what for?" said Belle quietly, leading the way in. "For giving me a good handshake? I liked it."

In the light of the hallway John saw that she was dressed in a dress of something white and filmy—he was no expert in dress-goods—and that there was a ribbon of some sort in her hair and that, possibly because he had spent three weeks in camp with nothing but unshaven men's faces to look upon, she was more bewilderingly beautiful than ever. Also, she seemed to have changed, to have matured slightly in some way too subtle for him to define, except to decide that she was more the woman.

"How do you like logging, Mr. Mud?" she asked as he divested himself of rubbers and mackinaw in the hallway. "And have you learned to like our grim, forbidding woods?"

"They aren't grim and forbidding any more," he laughed. "I'm getting chummy with them fast."

"Fine!" she cried, leading the way toward Wolf John's room. "Oh, Uncle John!" she called. "Here's Mr. Mud. Will you excuse me, Mr. Mud? I—if you please—am playing cook!"

Wolf John Peabody was standing spread-legged before the fireplace, his hands behind his back, his head bowed, but as John entered the head went up and a tiny smile showed in one corner of the old man's mouth.

"Welcome, Mud!" he called. He did not offer to shake hands, but his manner was more friendly than before. "Your name is still Mud, you'll notice, though if what I've heard of you is true, I begin to suspect there's a big new lump of a man who'll soon be bearing the name of Peabody in these woods. Lad, where ever in the cities did you pick up nerve enough to tackle a horse of a man like the big Swede? Sit down! Let's hear about you."

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JOHN suffered himself to answer a multitude of questions dragging from him the story of the two fights with Big Charley.

"Huh huh!" grunted the old man, pleased. "Modest, too, and that's right. Old Nels gave me the straight of it; I'm glad to hear that you don't count it any big thing, because it isn't. Fighting is a poor business—unless the other fellow says he's the best man. And now one question, nephew: Do you stay in the woods, or not?"

John looked out of the window toward where the park-like belt of straight pines ringed the settlement around. But it was Belle that he saw—Belle, and the smile she had greeted him with at the door.

"I feel at home here, Uncle John," he said suddenly. "I stay—if I'm wanted."

"Huh." The old man nodded curtly, as at a bargain that was closed. "And now I will tell you why I wrote to your father. You have heard something about the King Pine situation, and the gang at Whisky Falls?"

John related what Nels had told him.

"Exactly. Well, that gang up there has got on the good side of the Indians—if Indians have any good side—with their cursed whisky, and have got the tribal managers to refuse to extend my lease. If I don't log the King Pines before next Spring I'll never log 'em, and by the Lord Harry. log 'em I will! Peabody timber this is, mine by right of discovery. I cruised this country before any other white man knew of it. I located those King Pines; they were mine by all the rights they are; and then I discovered that they were on Chippewa, and it took me ten years to get a one-year lease on it.

"Do you think I look like the man to let ten years' work go for nothing? No! Peabody timber that is, and Peabody saw-logs it is going to make—even if it's only young John Mud Peabody who lives to see them behind the booms. Now, young fellow, do you glimpse the idea of why I wanted a male of my own kind by my side? Son of my own I never had; but those devils are not going to keep that timber out of the Peabody tribe."

He had dropped his head far forward. The big shoulders were bowed, and he looked an old, forlorn man, rather than the king-like figure that he had presented on the day of John's arrival in Peabody Point.

"Has that sign we saw up in the King Pines got on your nerves, Uncle John?" asked John, striving to speak lightly. "You don't really believe they'd dare to do anything of the sort; you know you'll beat them before they get a chance."

"It isn't that, Mud," said the old man, smiling. "It's not merely this; it's not merely the threats of Lowrey's whelps, and the fact that I know they'd make good if they had the chance. But a man who lives long in the woods, by himself, where things are about as they were in the beginning, he comes to feel things that he can not see, that he can not put in words. He gets closer to things, to life and death. He sees trees born, he sees trees getting ready to die. He has a 'feel' that tells him when he is near water, when he is nearing a clearing, when another man is approaching him, and, most of all, a feel that tells him when he is nearing the end of a trail.

"It's all Indian to you, I know, John. You're from the city, where men live in stone houses and cover the earth with asphalt, and are so far removed from natural things that they think they see all there is to see, because they are so blind and so without the 'feel' that they can not see the vast scheme of life as Nature ordains it.

"But we—some of us—who have kept close to the woods, we have that feel in some degree. Call it animal instinct if you will, call it 'being fey,' as the Scotchmen have it; it's all one. What did I say? Most of all the feel when he is nearing the end of a trail? Yes. And that feel has been on me many moons now: that I am nearing the end of my trail—a long one, but fairly straight. It's here," he said abruptly, thumping himself over the heart.

His face suddenly turned gray from pain and his mouth opened as if gasping for breath.

"—— the luck!" he growled when the spasm was over. "Nothing ever stopped me when I had anything to do; now this old heart of mine is trying to stop me—just now when I need it worst. Your heart's all right, isn't it, Mud? Well, that's good. I want yours to keep on pumping after this one of mine's stopped. Long enough to see the King Pines timber back of the Peabody Logging Company's booms," he added. "Now that's why I wanted one of my own kin here—if he is big enough to wear a man's shoes."

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As he recovered from the shock of this revelation John attempted to speak of a certain famous heart specialist in the city.

"Tut! Don't talk nonsense, boy. Do you think I'd be ready to give up until I knew for sure I was sawed through? I had that man up here. He charged me a thousand dollars for telling me to keep 'absolutely quiet' and I might last several years. The damn fool! If Bart hadn't pushed him away, I'd have tossed him out of the window."

John sat up at the mention of Bart's name.

"Bart knows—about it, then?" he asked.

"Didn't I say he saved the doctor from being man-handled?"

"When was it you had the doctor up here, Uncle John?"

"Last Summer."

"About the time Belle came home from school?"

Wolf John looked at his nephew sharply.

"Now why in the devil do you ask that? What business is it of yours? Your name is still Mud around here, remember. Yes, that was about when it was, if you must know. Why?"

John did not reply at once.

"Uncle John, you've got Bart here as your right-hand man," he said slowly. "You trust him as you do yourself, and he's the best logging boss in the woods. Then why do you want me here?"

"Haven't I told you? That's Peabody timber up there, and they're not going to get it away, even if they do get me first."

"No," said John steadily, "that isn't why."

"What!" His uncle glared at him angrily. Then his gaze went to the floor. "No, you're right. Bart, he's ambitious for himself. And there's little Belle." His hands shook slightly. "Good God, boy! Would you have me go leaving her without kith or kin, or any hold on anybody that I could trust to see that the world gave her a square deal? For myself I wouldn't give a——, but little Belle——"

He paused and sat staring at the floor. Presently he looked up shrewdly.

"Remember, Mud, your name's still Mud with me. Even though I say these things to you, you're still John Mud. Hist!" His eyes lighted up as footsteps sounded in the hallway. "There she is now. Mud—Mud, she doesn't know—about me. She isn't to know. Understand. Not a hint! Oh ho, Belle!" he cried cheerily as she threw open the door. "What d'you say?"

"Dinner's ready," said Belle. "I hope it doesn't make you ill, but I cooked it all myself."

"Make us ill!" laughed Wolf John, as if he had not a worry in the world. "Well, if it does we'll have little Belle to nurse us, and worse things than that could happen to a man, eh, Mud?"

AT THE table Wolf John was entirely his old self; he indulged in merry raillery—mostly at John's expense—as if he had not a care in the world.

"Tell us all about the logging business, Mud," he said. "You must know about all there is to learn about it by this time, don't you? No? Well, well! Belle, hear that; he hasn't learned all about the logging business in three weeks. Do you think he's worth keeping on the pay-roll?"

Belle smiled in a serene way that showed how familiar she was with the old man's rough humor.

"You're not kind to Mr. Mud, Uncle John," she said.

Wolf John broke into uproarious laughter.

"Hear that! Oh, hear that! 'Not kind to Mr. Mud!'" He laughed only harder as he saw John grow flustered under his joking. "We'll have Bull Bart tuck him into his bunk at night! What do you say, Belle?"

"Your partridge is growing cold, Uncle John," replied Belle quietly.

John laughed.

"What's funny?" demanded Wolf John.

"The idea of Mr. Bart tucking any one in at night," replied John, and watching Belle closely he noted that a troubled expression flitted over her face at the mention of Bart's name.

"Bart will be tucking 'em in tomorrow-night," said Wolf John grimly. "That's a man's job, putting a camp to bed after Christmas celebration. Something about logging, Mud: it's more important to be able to handle your men than your logs. Some never can do it; they'n't built that way."

He looked thoughtfully at John a moment; then he devoted himself to the partridge before him. For the rest of the meal

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he was silent, as if too occupied with a new idea to take part in the conversation. John and Belle had the talk to themselves. John had little to say. The gift of easy, meaningless conversation never had been his, and before Belle he was all but tongue-tied.

"You've got to sing for us after dinner, Mr. Mud," said she. "Oh, Nels has told me how you've sung for the men. I think that's jolly. You'll do as much for us as you would for the men, won't you?"

"Why did Nels want to tell you about that?" muttered John, embarrassed.

"I asked him to tell me all about you," said Belle frankly.

He looked at her. It was on his tongue to ask why she had done that, but his nerve failed him.

"My singing is only fitted for camp consumption," he said. "I think Nels might have omitted that."

"Don't you like old Nels, Mr. Mud?"

"You bet! He's a brick," said John heartily.

"I'm glad," she said. "Nels and I are old, old friends."

"He's my friend, too."

"You bet he is," said Belle. "He—he thinks you're fine."

"Thinks—I'm—great?" stammered John.

"Shall I tell you what he said?" she asked mischievously. "I ought to; it was really fine."

"Don't, Miss Peabody; please don't."

"He said: 'His name may be Mud, but his heart is all gold.' Now! Wasn't that pretty of him? I suppose it wasn't proper conduct of me to tell it, was it? I don't care; I wanted you to know, because—because I did. I liked old Nels a lot more for saying that. You're not angry?"

"Angry!" he stammered, and was tongue-tied. The meal was at an end now, and suddenly old Peabody smote the table.

"Yes," he said, "it's worth the risk. Mud, come into the library."

He led the way into the book-lined room, and John followed, wondering.

"Mud," said his uncle, when the door was closed, "you're going back to Main Camp tonight."

John stared at him in surprise. He saw his uncle's sharp eyes watching him for a sign of rebellion.

"All right," he said. "When shall I start?"

"Not curious, eh? Don't want to know why, eh? None of your business, eh?"

"You wouldn't tell me if I did ask," said John.

The door opened and Belle came in to find the two men looking at one another with set faces.

"Uncle! Mr. Mud! Whatever in the world is the matter? Why did you leave the table like that?"

She looked from one to the other in alarm. A wry smile crept into one corner of Wolf John's mouth.

"Nothing at all the matter, Belle," he said. "Mr. Mud has just remembered that he's got to go back to Main Camp tonight, and I'm—I'm trying to make him stay."

"Tonight?" Belle looked the disappointment that she felt. "Surely you're not going away so soon, Mr. Mud?"

"He says he's got to go tonight, and right away at that," interposed the uncle dryly. "He's a stubborn sort of a fellow, Belle; I don't think we'll be able to change his mind. When did you say you were going, Mud: as soon as you can get down the hill and get a horse hooked up for you?"

He laughed dryly.

"Yes; he's a stubborn fellow, Belle, and he says he's got to go right away. Run along now, Belle; I've got some business to talk over with this stubborn fellow before he starts."

He waited until the door had closed upon the girl, then seated himself at the writing table.

"You're going to take a note to Bart."

He wrote a single line and handed the note to John.

"Go down the hill and find Nels. He'll get a horse for you. You'll go out alone, because Nels is going to stay in the settlement over Christmas. Give the note to Bart as soon as you get to camp. That's all. Then stay in camp until Bart gets back. Good night."

"Good night," said John.

AS HE went out he paused on the broad porch for a moment and looked up at the starlit sky. A breeze was stirring the pines about the settlement and the sough of the branches seemed to echo the storm that was in his heart. Peace there was all over the face of earth and heavens, peace and quiet so far as the eye could see. But the gentle

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swish of pine boughs was a hint and a threat of the storm and strife lurking beneath the elemental calm. John's feet were on the stairs when a whisper came to him from behind a near-by pillar.

"Mr. Mud! What is it; what is the matter? You and Uncle John haven't quarreled, have you? Has anything terrible happened? You—you look troubled—unhappy. Won't you tell me what it is, please? I—I'm sorry if anything has happened."

John looked down at Belle as she stood before him in the starlit night. There was pain in the girl's eyes and in her trembling lips. A new thrill went through him as he looked upon her. Lone and helpless she looked out there in the night and John thrilled and was glad of it. He reached out his hand, and she took it and held it between her two hands for an instant.

"Nothing is the matter, Miss Peabody," he said. "Please don't look frightened or worried. If you do, I'll remember it and be blue all the time I'm in Main Camp."

"Oh, I don't want you to do that," she whispered. "But are you sure——"

"That everything is all right? Yes, quite sure. Will you take my word for it? There's nothing for you to worry about."

She looked at him without replying.

"Won't you take my word for it?" he asked.

"Yes," she said simply. "Because even if you're lying, I believe you're doing it for a good purpose."

CHAPTER XIV

THE WOMAN IN THE SNOW

DOWN in the settlement he quickly found old Nels, who, though greatly surprised, soon had a horse and cutter ready.

"Say the word and I'll go back to camp with you," he said as John stepped in and took the lines. "No? Don't want me? Well, anyhow look in my shoe-packs under my bunk when you get to camp. You'll find a six-gun in one of them, all loaded. And if you have to use it shoot low—good luck!"

The spirited horse took the cutter out of the settlement at a brisk trot. In the woods John pulled up to a walk. He was in no mood to hurry away from Peabody Point.

The horse, going at a reined-in walk, began to whine and dance, and John suddenly woke up to the fact that it was growing bitter cold. Straight down from the star-filled north a wind born in the ice-caves of the Arctics was bringing the inevitable cold-snap of that time of the year for that latitude, and John, with his face against the wind, shivered and let the horse break into a sharp trot. He soon found that, while the brisk pace enabled the horse to keep warm, he himself grew colder the more rapidly he drove.

He was five miles when he leaped from the cutter and began to run at the horse's head. The intelligent animal, at first alarmed, soon displayed the thankfulness that domestic animals display at the nearness of humankind in the wilderness. With a whinny he muzzled John's shoulder. John laughed and patted him. Then they went on, the horse with his muzzle close to John's back, and dropping to a walk as John slowed up, breaking into a trot when John's long legs led the way. In this fashion they were jogging down the far side of a hog-back within rifle-shot of Main Camp when John stopped so suddenly that the horse's muzzle rammed him in the back before the beast could stop. Something dark was lying huddled in the snow of the tote-road. As John stooped over, it struggled and moaned.

"Good God! A woman!" In the dim starlight John caught a glimpse of a pale, bruised face and for a moment he was so dumfounded that he could only stand and stare.

"What say?" The woman opened her eyes and spoke sleepily.

Numbly she struggled to her knees, swayed so for an instant, then toppled stiffly back into the snow. In two seconds John had her in his arms and was carrying her back to the cutter. The sudden movement and the warmth of his virile young body seemed to rouse the woman from her lethargy. Her eyes opened as he placed her gently in the cutter seat and she tried to smile.

Even there in the half darkness John saw that once this woman had been beautiful in slender refined fashion and to his amazement he saw that she was well dressed, that a necklace glistened on her white throat and that there were many rings on her ice-cold fingers. She struggled long

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before she was able to speak, smiling pathetically all the while.

"Just frozen, not drunk," she managed to say at last. "Got caught in the cold snap; wasn't dressed for it. Weak heart."

"Good Heavens! I should say you weren't dressed for it," said John. He caught the ice-cold fingers between his own and began to rub.

He took snow and rubbed as precaution against frost-bite. When he felt the deadness go out of her hands and the blood of life begin to warm them he tore the big muskrat-hide mittens from the strings over his shoulders and placed her hands in their warm interiors. She watched him, silent, motionless, with a skeptical smile on her pallid lips. Her teeth began to chatter.

"That's a good sign," she said faintly. "I'm not dead yet."

"Of course you're not," said John briskly. "Nothing of the sort. You're just a little frozen."

He whipped off his mackinaw and, handling her as if she were a child, buttoned and strapped it closely about her shivering body. He crammed his heavy fur cap over the light knitted affair that covered her head. Then he lifted her from the cutter and set her on her feet.

"Walk as fast as you can," he ordered, passing his arm around her. "That's the only way to get the blood moving again."

She laughed weakly and allowed herself to be dragged up and down the road. As the chilled blood began to move through her veins her movements became more elastic and rapid.

"Run," commanded John, and they ran in a circle about the cutter. She stopped, panting, presently.

"I'm all right now," she said. "And now —what?"

"Now you'll get into the cutter and we'll drive on to Main Camp where you can get out of the cold and get something warm to eat and wear."

"Main Camp!" She stepped back. "I can't go back—I can't go there."

John was amazed.

"Can't go there? Why, where were you going on this road at this time of night?"

She smiled skeptically again.

"Why to Whisky Falls, of course."

"To Whisky Falls? Then you were going from Main Camp?"

"Yes," she said defiantly. "Anything else?"

"But don't you know that this is the road to Peabody Point?"

"Get out!"

"Yes, it is; I'm on my way from the Point to Main Camp."

She smiled foolishly.

"I'm a peach of a woodser, ain't I?" she said. "I leave Main Camp for Whisky Falls and get mixed up and go toward the Point. That would have been one on me if I'd made the Point. Well, I've just got to turn around and hike for the Falls."

"You can't do it," said John firmly. "You couldn't make it; you must come with me to Main Camp."

"I daren't; I can't." She shuddered and stared around wildly, her mittened hands going to her bruised face. "I've got to go to the Falls. I may not make it, but I'd have an easier time freezing to death in the snow than if I went back to Main Camp now. Well?"

She looked up at him with the pathetic, skeptical smile on her lips.

"Well," said John bluntly, "if you're sure you can't go to Main Camp——"

"I tell you I can't! I'd die in the road first."

"Then I'll have to drive you up to Whisky Falls, that's all. Will you get in, please, so we can get started?"

A LOOK of wonderment became mingled with her skeptical smile as she climbed hesitatingly into the cutter. She looked up at John's face as he seated himself respectfully beside her.

"Are you really going to go out of your way that much—for me?" she asked. Her flippancy and assurance were gone, and she spoke shyly.

"Why, you wouldn't hardly expect a man to leave a lady to walk that far on a night like this, would you?" said John.

She looked away.

"Stop your kidding," she said bitterly.

They came to where, just outside of the Main Camp clearing, the small road branched off to Whisky Falls.

"You'd better let me get out here," she said weakly. "You go in to camp; I'll make it—somehow, I guess."

"I hope I haven't offended you," said John, as he steered the horse on to the road to the Falls. "But even if I have, my job

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for the present is to get you to your destination."

"Offended me?" she laughed mockingly. "That's rich! That's a joke."

Without offering an explanation she lapsed into silence which remained unbroken for miles. The cold was growing more intense; the pair of them cowered down behind the robes as well as they could, wasting as little breath as possible in speech. When they came to where the road ceased and the little trail began which ran along the river side, through the ravine and up the plateau to the buildings of Whisky Falls, John pulled up and stiffly tied the horse to a tree.

"No, no," she cried, springing from the cutter. "You mustn't go up to the Falls. You—you ain't our kind. Don't spoil it! Don't ask to go with me; don't dirty yourself by having anything to do with such truck as us."

"I—I'm certainly going to see that you get to—to your friends all right," stammered John, uncomfortably embarrassed. "Come on; I'll see you up the hill, anyhow. I insist. Come, you'll freeze here."

He led her over the narrow path to the slit in the rocks where the path went up to the top of the plateau.

"Please, please!" she panted, dragging back there. "I'm all right; I swear by my mother I'm all right. I'll go on and be in my—my place in a couple of minutes. But don't you come—you—you're too clean!"

She saw his bare hands, his lightly covered head, his uncovered sweater. With a cry she tore the mittens, mackinaw and cap from her and threw them at him.

"I don't suppose you'll wear them now that they've been on me," she moaned. "I don't blame you. Oh, oh! Are there really men like you in this world?"

John was putting on cap, mittens and mackinaw without a word. She came close to him.

"You know what I am, don't you?" she whispered in awe. "You knew all the time; I see it in your eyes; and yet you helped me. And you—you don't want anything, either; I can see that, too. Listen: I know who you are, Mr. Mud. I saw you the night you licked Big Charley. And let me tell you something, Mr. Mud, Bart has got it in for you to the limit."

"You know Bart?" asked John.

"Do I know him—the devil?" She pointed to the bruises on her face. "Look at that. Bart did that job. Do I know him? He owns me, body and soul."

At the sight of the bruised face a groan of horror and anger escaped from John's lips.

"Don't—don't you trouble yourself one bit about it," said the woman quickly. "It doesn't matter a bit; I'm used to it. But I am going to try some day to make it right with you because you saved my life tonight. No; I don't mean that: I mean because—because you treated me the way you did, and knew all the time. If I ever can do anything—but, pshaw! all I can do is—thanks and God bless——"

"Hold on!" cried John, a sudden inspiration flashing through him. "Maybe you can do something, if you really want to. Does Bart know who I am?"

"No; he suspects you're a spotter of some kind, though."

"I'm not," said John.

"But you're on Wolf John's side?"

"I am—decidedly so!"

"Against—the other side?"

"Against the men who are trying to scare him out of logging the King Pines, which are legitimately his for one year's logging," replied John firmly.

The woman was silent for some time.

"I—I'm on the other side," she said faintly. "Do you want me to get out?"

John laughed.

"Of course not. But they're a lot of crooks."

"I know it," she whispered brokenly. "I know I ought to quit them, but I can't. I can't; I'm afraid."

"Who are you afraid of? Of Bart?"

She shook her head.

"Of Bart? No, not so much. Somebody else—somebody worse," she whispered.

"Wah Song?" suggested John.

She was silent.

"Tell me this—if you really want to do something because I've helped you: Is Bart one of your gang?"

Her eyes suddenly grew large and distended with terror.

"What made you say that?" she gasped. "I haven't said anything like that, have I? No, no; don't think that—don't say that about Bart, please."

"Are Wah Song and Bart partners?"

"No. I don't know. I don't know anything about what's going on—not much,

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anyhow. I—oh, I wish you hadn't found me there in the road. I wish I dared tell you. Oh, I wish I was dead! But tell Miss Peabody—Belle—No, No! I'm afraid—I'm afraid to tell you!"

She turned and ran swiftly up the cleft in the rocks. A short way off she paused and looked back.

"I won't let them do it," she cried sobbingly. "I won't if I can help it. If I can I—I'll show you that even one like me can be human."

JOHN stared after her as she disappeared up the path toward the lights of Whisky Falls. Then he got into the cutter and drove back to Main Camp, pondering generally on the problem of womankind, and about this poor woman's words about Belle in particular.

It was in the chill gray of morning that he pulled into camp, and the stablemen were just moving to their early tasks. The thermometer had fallen steadily all night and John was numbed near to helplessness as he stumbled from the cutter before the stable.

"Where's Bart?" he chattered to one of the lantern-carrying figures which were breaking open hay bales to feed the horses.

"Right here," came Bart's voice from behind him.

As John turned to face him the memory of the woman's bruised face drove the chill from his veins in a rush of anger, but he controlled himself and handed Bart the note from Wolf John without a word. Bart read by the light of a stableman's lantern, and looked triumphantly up at John.

"I guess you didn't make much of a hit down at the Point, did you, Mr. Mud?" he sneered. "Hook up the big iron gray to this cutter," he commanded a stableman. John had stumbled toward his sleeping-quarters and Bart overtook him in a few giant strides.

"Thinking of staying in Main Camp, Mud?" he snapped.

"I am," said John.

"All right." Bart nodded grimly. "I haven't got time to stop and make it unhealthy for you just now. But if you're here when I come back I promise you that you'll find this place turned into a cold, bitter place for somebody, alias Jack Mud."

CHAPTER XV

CHRISTMAS DAY AT MAIN CAMP

CHRISTMAS DAY, after the custom of the woods, was a quiet holiday at Main Camp. More than half of the men had gone out of the wood the evening before. Some had drawn their time and had quit, desiring more time and freedom for the celebration of the day than camp rules would permit. Some had gone to spend the day with their families in the settlement.

The majority of those who had left camp, however, had gone to Whisky Falls for the inevitable spree, the stinging cold interfering not at all with their gratification of their appetites. The men remaining in camp were of the more quiet class, some married men whose families were too far away to be reached for the holiday, some decent, clean young fellows who were saving their money, and some—a scant few—to whom the red delights of Whisky Falls were no temptation. They constituted the sober, dependable element of the camp, men who could be relied upon.

Because of the bitterness of the day they celebrated their holiday mainly in the cook-shanty and the bunk-house. A few hardy spirits, led by the irrepressible Dugan, ventured forth after deer and came back cursing the weather. When John awoke and came into the bunk-house at noon, he was greeted with shouts of surprise and welcome. Some demanded a reason for his sudden return. To these John made no reply, the humiliation which he had suffered at Home Camp still rankling in his bosom.

Other men thrust into his hands the old guitar and dragged him forth to a box serving as a dais at one end of the long room, buffeting him heartily and demanding that he play and sing lest worse befall him. John complied readily with their request, attacking the instrument, and roaring forth songs in an effort to still the dark thoughts that were troubling him.

"Give us 'Home Sweet Home,' " growled a grizzled old lumber-jack, and after John had played the first bars the men began to join in, rough, cracked voices shyly following the lead of their bolder fellows until the windows of the bunk-house rattled with the might of the chorus. As always happens in a crowd of rough, harsh-living men, that

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song touched the hearts of those who sang and listened.

When it was over the men sat silent, busy with their own thoughts. Three or four strolled to the windows and stood looking out; others found it necessary to rummage aimlessly after something in their bunks; and some lighted pipes with great ostentation.

"Home!" bitterly laughed "Whitey Jack," he of the silvered head. "For the last five Springs I've been starting home with a Winter's check in my pocket and those devils at Whisky Falls have sent me back here cleaned to the bone. Last Spring Curly Joe got me at poker. But not this Spring, boys! They don't get Whitey Jack this time; you'll see."

The boys laughed; for Jack had made this same statement in the same positive manner for the last five years.

"Curly Joe," repeated Brackett reminiscently. "'Member his run-in with Curly Joe, Jack?"

"Wasn't I there?" said Jack. "Didn't I see it with these here two eyes? It was right after the drive was down in the Spring — 'bout fifteen years ago that was, too—and the gang was celebrating out to Emil Blondet's road-house. Curly Joe was running the games; had a man at the wheel and the bank, and 'tended to the poker-game himself. He was from the West, Curly was, and as fine a man to look at as ever wore a mackinaw. Tall—must have been six feet and a half—and built to fit, with long curly black hair that got him his name. And shoot—that man was a better man with the rifle than old Nels."

An argument started over this statement, many of the men in camp questioning the possibility of there being a better shot than Nels. After the argument died down Jack resumed.

"Anyhow, he could outshoot anything I ever see go against him with the rifle, and he was quite a man other ways. He came to the bush with diamonds and jewelry and a roll that looked like the butt-end of a log. He was the king-bee while he was doing the humming, and he might have been a big man yet if one of the boys he trimmed hadn't swore he was using a hold-out. I forget who the lad was, but he used his knife and Curly Joe just took it away from him and broke his arm and threw him through the window. That was the third of the boys he'd laid out!

"ONE day old Wolf John walks into the poker-room, when Joe hasn't got anybody playing with him, slaps ten thousand dollars' worth of bills on the table and says:

"'Mr. Tin Horn Gambler, if I thought you had anything but chicken feed in your clothes I'd give you a crack at that!' Curly Joe takes a look at Wolf John and another at the roll and then says quiet, 'Emil, bring me my roll out of the safe, and a fresh deck of cards.' He counts his bills up to ten thousand dollars and says, 'Haven't you got any real money?'

"'Yes,' says the old man and slaps another package like the first on the table. 'Keep on counting,' he says.

"Curly Joe kind of wet his lips and finally shows down fourteen thousand dollars. 'Good enough,' says the old man and breaks open the deck. 'I've heard o' you,' says Curly; 'sometimes I ride for weeks to tame gents with a local reputation.'

"'Then they's no need for cards,' says Wolf John, stopping the deal. 'Put away the deck. Emil,' he says, 'open the trap-door to your cellar. Mister Curly Joe,' he says, 'you and me'll go downstairs together, let Emil roll a whisky barrel on to the trap-door and leave it there for an hour. The man who's able to come up at the end gets the money.'

"Curly Joe, he wore a six-shooter on one hip and a skinning-knife on the other, and the old man's hands was flat on the table, but Curly has to kind of look away. I tell you, when the old man gets that way you kind of feel him pressing on you with those eyes of his.

"'I'm a gambler, not a butcher,' says Curly. 'I skin my meat without killing it,' and he deals 'em around. But Wolf John had him. He'd put it on him right at the start, and when the luck starts running against Curly Joe, it begins to bring out the streak that's up Curly's spine.

"Hour after hour they sat there, just the two of 'em, and little by little Curly Joe begins to wilt, and bigger and bigger the streak begins to show in him. Pretty soon he begins to wet his lips with his tongue and he says, 'How long you want to play?'

"'I'm going to play until I've broke you,' says Wolf John. 'You're going to sit here until you're smaller'n a pup dog that's tackled a grown bobcat. I'm going to send you out of here with your nerve gone,'

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says he. 'I'm going to show you it's expensive to shoot men on my pay-roll.'

"'Are you?' says Curly, and reaches for his six-gun.

"'I am,' says Wolf John, and he catches the wrist and just squeezes it until the blood squirted from under Curly's finger-nails. When Curly yells 'Enough' Wolf John lets him go, giving him back his gun.

"'Sit down and play,' he says. 'You're not a broken man yet.' Then they have it hour after hour again, and Joe looks like he's being hung up by his thumbs.

"Finally, when he's within a few hundred of the end of his roll, he begins trying to mark the cards, using his cigarette. Then they have it out, Curly with his skinning-knife and six-gun and the old man just with his bare hands. And when they're through Curly Joe is a broken man for life. Six months in the hospital, and when he comes out he's a twisted cripple that it hurts you to look at even if you know it was only what he had coming to him."

"But he can still shoot," volunteered Burns, of the bandaged head.

"Wha-a-at?" Whitey Jack was surprised. "You ain't seen him lately?"

"Well, I guess so," was the answer. "He's meat-hunter for the gang at Whisky Falls. One of their favorite jokes up there is to tie a fellow to a tree, stand a bottle of beer on his head, and have Curly Joe—Twisted Joe, they call him now—break it at two hundred yards. When the beer comes running down the fellow's face they all holler: 'Oh, too bad. Right through the head; watch him bleed.' Some faint dead away, thinking they been killed."

CHAPTER XVI

BOSS FOR A NIGHT

"WHEE-YEW!" Whitey Jack whistled loudly. "Now, let me tell you something, lumber-jacks, if Curly Joe's one of that gang up at the Falls, and if they really got nerve enough to buck Wolf John if he starts logging King Pines, Wolf John had better make sure Curly ain't within half a mile of him when the fight starts or there'll be a funeral down to Peabody Point just as sure's a gun's iron."

"Ah! Joe ain't got no nerve left to buck the old man."

"Not face to face, no! But a hundred or two hundred rods away, laying behind a wind-fall, looking over the sights of a 30-40, that's just deer-shooting for a man like Curly Joe."

"Yes; and if little old Nels should get his sights on Curly 'bout that time——"

"Ah-h-h!" The listeners growled enthusiastically at the picture called up by this suggestion.

"There'd be something to talk about, lumber-jacks; Curly Joe and old Nels turned loose in the timber hunting each other! And it would all be settled with one shot."

They now began an argument over the problem of who might be returned the winner in such a grim contest, debating seriously the respective woodsmanship of the two men, the disadvantage under which Curly Joe labored through being crippled, and the advantage he possessed in using the high-power 30-40 rifle with its superiority of range over Nels' 45-90.

A month before John would have considered their conversation monstrous and barbaric, or have thought it impossible outside of freakish fiction or melodrama. Now he had partaken of the grimness of the Big Woods and the stern blood-talk of the men fell as naturally on his ears as the cruel whoosh of the north wind in the pine boughs.

It was all part of the game as it was played here in the North: when the test came men held their lives and souls together by the bare strength of arm and heart that had been given them, without the aid of law or other sheltering devices of civilization. Man to man; man to Nature—the old primal, eternal arrangement. The law of Fight. Wherefore, in the woods, wise men kept themselves clean of besmirching action, lest in the ultimate test their souls fail to stead them, strong and unafraid.

The argument was interrupted by the entrance of the red-headed Dugan.

"They're starting to come back from the Falls," he said with a grin. "Pat McCooey just came staggering into the cook-shack begging for black coffee. His eyes are blacked like he'd been kicked by a mule. Oh, we'll have a fine collection of snake-charmers here tonight all right."

"I don't understand it," said Brackett, seriously. "Wolf John knows what Christmas night is in camp, and here he sends for Bart to come down to the Point, and the straw-boss off on a bat. I wonder if Bart's

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coming back tonight. If he don't, there'll be trouble in camp before morning."

NORBY, the Norwegian, leaned his arms on the window-sill and stood looking out, placidly puffing his pipe. Out of the timber and across the open, whitened space before the bunk-house came weaving two huge figures, arm in arm, shouting, cursing, laughing at the top of their bull-like voices. Straight to the door of the bunk-house they came, lurching into the room, leaving the door wide open behind them.

"Hello, you —— —— white-livered, camp-meeting —— — ——!" roared the biggest of the pair. "Stay at home; save your money, you poor high-bankers! Ain't men enough to go out and drink like men."

"But they're goin' tuh drink now!" bellowed his companion, drawing a quart bottle of whisky from his mackinaw. "Here, you weak sports, drink that up or I'll make you eat the bottle."

Even as he waved the bottle above his head Norby had moved silently from the window to a position behind them. Brackett and Whitey Jack rose slowly from their bunks. Suddenly Norby's thick arms licked around the necks of the two drunken men, pulling their heads back, throttling them. Brackett and Whitey Jack, diving forward, each caught a pair of unsteady legs to their bosoms. There was a sudden rush of feet, a jam in the doorway; then the two noisy ones were lying bewildered in the snow and Norby was smashing the whisky bottle against the bunk-house walls.

"Yes, that's all right for one or two," grumbled Burns, "but how about it when two, three dozen of 'em come piling in like that?" He touched the bandage on his head. "I wouldn't move a finger to stop 'em. Let 'em tear the camp to pieces. It's Bart's job; I wouldn't sweat myself saving his camp for him."

"Neither will I," said Norby, "but I will smash every whisky bottle shoved under my nose; that's all I will do."

"It'd serve Bart right if they stole the teams on him," grumbled the injured man. "Yes, I hope they clean out the whole stables."

"Oh, I guess they won't be that bad," said Brackett.

"Remember last Christmas?"

"Sure."

"They set fire to the hay-barn that night —and Bart was here."

"It's a funny trick," agreed Norby. "It ain't like Wolf John to leave Main Camp without a boss Christmas Night."

"Well, I for one won't do Bart's work if they get rough," said Brackett.

"Me neither; me neither," chimed in other men.

"They ain't going to rip the bunk-house up," put in Whitey Jack. "We'll take care of that, because we want to sleep here. But they can take the rest of the camp to pieces for all of me."

John looked out of the window. Half a dozen whisky-maddened lumber-jacks were staggering out of the timber, yelling and laughing. Main Camp was without a boss to protect it against the insane whims of the men who had been to Whisky Falls.

AS THE swift darkness drew near, the celebrators came stumbling into camp in droves. Despite the thirty-below-zero weather they came with mackinaws open at the throat, many of them bare-headed, more with unmittened hands.

Bobcats and wolves lay snug in the depths of their caves that night, the deer, yarding in the hearts of dense cedar swamps, huddled flank to shoulder to keep warm; but the drink-inflamed woodsmen exposed themselves recklessly, neither heeding the dangers they ran nor suffering the slightest frost-bite from their carelessness. The providence which guards the drunken man was with them in a generous mood, for sober men suffered frost-bites by the score and even dropped on the road during that slow, staggering return from the celebration at Whisky Falls.

There was no Bart to meet them in the camp clearing, to search them for whisky and smash their bottles against the stumps. They brought their whisky in undisturbed. Bart wasn't in camp, the word went around; the straw-boss wasn't in camp; nobody was in camp who had a single —— thing to say. As the significance of this information seeped into their muddled brains the drunken crew gave one wild whoop, and proceeded to turn the camp into a maudlin hell.

The cook-shack was their first point of attack, for not even the grewsome quantities of bad liquor in their systems could still the frost-shot bodies' natural cry for food. The

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fat cook came puffing over to the bunk-house.

"What'll I do, what'll I do?" he spluttered. "The wild Injuns! They're raving; they're crazy! They'll wreck the shack if they don't get food right away and Bart's orders is to feed nobody between meals. What'll I do? It's my job against the shack. Hey, somebody, tell me what'll I do?"

The men laughed. There is always a feud between the hard-worked lumber-jacks and the soft-lying camp "doctor."

"By ——! It's serious, I tell you. If they start going, there won't be any cook-shack left to get breakfast in in the morning. What am I going to do?"

"Feed them," said John suddenly. It was out before he had time to think of the consequences of his utterance. Every man in the room turned and looked at him, as if they had been waiting for him to speak. He had forgotten the popularity, approaching leadership, which he had acquired in the camp, and had spoken only as seemed natural to the situation.

Now he saw what he had done. With two words he had assumed the leadership which the sober men had been waiting for. Without a leader they would not move, and none of them wished to assume the leadership. They were relieved that some one would accept the responsibility of being boss, and John saw plainly that they had been hoping, even expecting, that he would do it.

"But Bart's orders?" whined the cook.

John knew it was no time to falter or quibble after having taken the first step.

"You say they'd wreck the cook-shack. Are you sure they would go that far?"

"Come and look at 'em!" The cook waved his fat arms. "They'd do it in a minute."

"Well, we can't have the kitchen put out of business—even if you've got Bart's orders. Go ahead; feed them. It's the only thing to do."

"But suppose Bart——"

The oily servility of the cook irritated John.

"Feed 'em!" he said shortly; and the cook disappeared.

John looked around the room. And a new, deep thrill shot along his spine—the thrill that comes once in a lifetime to a man, the thrill of for the first time seeing strong men look up to him as their leader.

"We'll back you up, Mud," said Brackett. Other men nodded.

"Somebody had to say the word," supplemented Norby. "The camp had to have a boss."

The hot food which the cook and Dugan hurriedly hurled before the ravening crowd in the cook-shack lulled the storm for the time being. On some the food and warmth had its effect after the long walk in the cold air and they came stumbling drowsily to their bunks in the bunk-house.

Norby, Brackett, Whitey Jack and the other sober men waited until they slept, then skilfully stole the bottles from their pockets and smashed them against the log walls outside. But the stronger men took on new life with their meal. It mattered not to them that they had been up all the night before, that their blood was poisoned with the vilest concoctions ever masquerading under the label of whisky, that they had staggered six miles through a stinging cold. As their systems began to absorb nourishment the desire for more excitement, more play, more alcohol came back on them. They began to sing and drink. Soon their whisky was gone.

"Holy, red-roaring, jumping Ju-peeter!" cried one. "Every man still on his feet and not a drop of liquor in camp! Boys, it's back to the Falls for me. Who comes along?"

"Horses, horses, horses!" shrieked another. "Who said we was slaves? Who's going to walk when there's forty head o' horseflesh eating their heads off in those stables? Horses! We'll use the horses!"

At this, Dugan hastily slipped out and ran to the bunk-house.

"They're going to the stables," he gasped. "French Jimmy just thought of the horses, and they're fixing it up to go back to the Falls. There they go! They're going to the stables now!"

John walked slowly to the window and looked out. Within he was seething with excitement, even with apprehension that approached fear, but he betrayed it no more than would the hardiest old river-hog in the crew.

FROM the door of the cook-shack, across the open space before it, there was a ragged line of hurrying men, reaching almost to the stables. They were staggering and shouting demoniacally their demand for horses and sleighs. As

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John looked, old Lavin, a stableman, came to the door of the stables. The instant he saw the line he realized what was coming and slammed shut the door.

The first man in the line, the man called French Jimmy, picked up a heavy peavy and hurled his weight behind it against the door. The door cracked open. Quick hands reached forth and tore it to pieces. French Jimmy, leaping inside, dragged forth old Lavin and threw him to one side as if he had been a boy of ten.

Then the gang swarmed into the stables, and then John, without a word, without asking or thinking of asking any one to follow him, dashed out of the bunk-house, across the clearing and hurled himself like a bolt through the crowd choking the stable door.

Norby, Brackett, Davis, Burns, Whitey Jack, and a dozen others followed, as men follow the man they have selected as their leader. They came, a flying wedge of quick, sober men, ere the drunken mob had time to sense what was happening. In the same moment that John, meeting French Jimmy leading out a team, was knocking his man down, the men behind him were throwing the drunks out of the stable, away from the door, clearing the field with the unexpectedness and force of their rush.

As John knocked down a second man, Burns and Whitey Jack came in and methodically threw his victims out into the snow. Then the drink-maddened crew, slowly gathering what had happened to them, realizing painfully that they had been manhandled and whipped, recoiled for a moment, formed into a compact body, and with a devil's mob-yell came like one man for the stables.

It was no child's play now. Drunk though the assailants were, they were still men who could hold their own any place in the world in a rough and tumble. Men were knocked clear from the ground, landing on their shoulders and coming upright again as if on strings. In the first onslaught John saw the gigantic Burns toss a man over his head, heard the man's bones creak as he struck the frozen ground and to his amazement saw him spring up and reënter the fight.

"Rush 'em!" he cried, and taking advantage of the lull in the attack the sober men rushed forward in a body, scattering the would-be horse-thieves to the four winds, driving them back, and in the end chasing them into the timber in a complete rout.

"Brackett, Whitey Jack, Burns, Norby—you stay with me and guard the stables tonight," said John. "Some of the others—" he called out half a dozen names—"go and sleep in the cook-shack. The rest of you go back to the bunk-house and see that nothing starts there."

"How about me?" protested Davis, the teamster. "I belong with the horses."

"Five of us is enough here," said John sharply. "The rest of you do as I've told you."

They obeyed. He knew they would obey before he spoke. He felt it; it was in his bones, in the way the men looked at him, in the way they had fought at his back.

"By golly!" snickered Norby, sticking an ear back in place, "I don't think Bull Bart could have done it any better."

All the night John and his men in the stables kept order in Main Camp. All night long John was on his feet, suppressing fresh attacks on the stables before they were fully born, hauling sodden lumber-jacks from beds in the snow to their bunks, watching them all so that they did themselves nor any one else harm, and he wondered greatly that he should have handled the situation successfully.

Bart came driving into camp with the cold graying of dawn. He was humming a tune, and was in a merry, triumphant humor that contrasted strangely with the threatening mood of the morning before. Self-satisfaction and serene confidence showed plainly in his eyes.

"Hello, Mud!" he cried, as John met him at the stables. "Where did you get that smash in the jaw?"

John told him briefly how the men had come back from Whisky Falls.

"And you stalled 'em did you, Mud?" laughed Bart. "Well, well! You'll be a man if you keep on, Mud; yes sir, you'll be a real he-man some day and I'll give you a job as straw-boss in one of my camps."

He stamped stiffly away toward the cook-shack, laughing and humming happily.

John looked after him dubiously. He could think of but one thing which could have wrought such a change in Bart; and as the picture of Belle rose up before his eyes he became conscious of a cold, numbing fear creeping over his heart.

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CHAPTER XVII

"MUD NO MORE"

TO JOHN'S surprise Bart, in the next two days, made no sign of fulfilling his threat that Main Camp would be an unhealthy place for one John Mud. The foreman apparently was in too good a humor to remember his unpleasant intentions toward John. He went about his duties with a smile on his lips, humming a tune, and with a look of triumph in his bright eyes. The bitter lines about his mouth and the troubled frown on his brows had vanished. He was like a man who sees his plans succeed after a doubtful struggle, and John reasoned that it must have been during Bart's trip to Home Camp—where he would have seen Belle—that this success must have been achieved.

Main Camp was on the last week of the work assigned to it, and Bart, despite his exuberance and good humor, apparently was determined that the job should wind up with a record-breaking output. John had been surprised at Bart's energy from the first, now he was amazed. The man became a thunderbolt in boots. As Dugan, the cookee, put it: "He was everywhere all the time." He kept Main Camp's crew literally on the jump from daylight until dark. Thoroughly hated though he was by probably fifty per cent. of the crew, Bart now demonstrated how thoroughly he was the master of his men and how well justified was Wolf John's dependence upon him.

Under his electric driving the crew swept upon the remaining timber like farmers upon standing grain. The big Norways, white pine and hemlocks fell like wheat before the sickle. In the woods there was the constant, *Whoosh*,—"Look-out!" and cannon-like crackle that told of another forest giant thumping in the snow; on the ice-roads there was cursing and straining of logging-chains as the teamsters vied with each other in moving record loads; and on the roll-ways there was all day the steady, dull *boom-boom-boom* of logs rolling down to their berths on the ice-covered river.

"The ——— ———!" confided Brackett to John admiringly. "He makes all other walking-bosses look like kids when it comes to getting out the timber."

So well did Bart drive his capable crew that on the fourth day after Christmas the men knew that the morrow would see the clean-up of Main Camp's timber. Which, they reminded each other, would see Wolf John in camp, it being his custom to be with his men whenever work was started or completed on a job.

At one o'clock the next day, a Thursday, the men came trooping in from the woods to the cook-shack with their work done. Bart had saved his hardest whip for the last day, and before the men were allowed to go to their noon meal they had completed what ordinarily would have been a full day's work. As they bent ravenously over their food in the cook-shack, the door opened and, looking up, they saw Wolf John Peabody himself standing looking at them with appreciative eyes.

"Good work, boys!" boomed his great voice. "When we started the job here I figured that you'd be knocking the last of 'em down the end of this week. You beat my guess by two days. Cookee, set me a plate here. I'm hungry enough to eat you if you don't hustle!"

A pleased grumble ran around the table. That was like the old man: he was a hard driver, but he gave you credit when you did the right thing; he was rich enough to travel with the big bugs, but he didn't feel that he was too good to sit down and eat with the boys.

Dugan, so pleased and flustered that his face grew nearly as red as his hair, hurriedly ran to the pantry for a plate, stumbled over his own feet, dropped the plate, and finally succeeded in serving the Big Boss to the tune of uproarious laughter, in which Wolf John's voice rang loudest of all.

"Well boys," said Peabody, when the clatter of rapid eating had died down, "this is the finish of Main Camp. We are through here. There will be no lay-off or cutting down of the crew. We are all going to stay on, who want to. Saturday, the day after the first, we are going to begin to move Main Camp—up into the King Pines."

He paused and looked down the table, first down one side then up the other, eying each man closely.

"I see some of you want to know about the row with these bums up at Whisky Falls," he continued. "To those I'll say this: you can get your time at the office this afternoon. That's all. The King Pines job will last well into the Spring. We'll

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start logging back from the river now while there's snow, and work toward the river.

"While the roads last we ought to get out all but a belt along the stream. We'll skid them to the water on the bare ground, and make up a late drive.

"The job will last until pretty close to low-water time, and there'll be mill-jobs all Summer for every man who stays through with us. For those who don't, the Peabody Logging Company will never be able to use again. Of course I know that most of you'll stay, the kind of boys who can knock the timber down the way you fellows have done here at Main Camp aren't the kind to turn high-bankers just because a few bums have shot off their mouths at the boss. If the Peabody Logging Company couldn't take care of itself, and of its men, it wouldn't be doing business as it is to-day."

THE men laughed and cheered. Wolf John was the man who knew how to talk to the boys: he gave it to you straight from the shoulder, and you knew where you had him all the time. A number of men put their heads together and talked rapidly at the farther end of the table. Then the youngest of them spoke up, half-timidly, half-boldly, driven on by his friends.

"Say, Mr. Peabody—the boys says—they want to know—Mr. Peabody—we ain't going to wind up Main Camp without a dance, are we?"

"You bet we ain't, son!" responded Peabody instantly.

"Whoop-ee!" yelled the men.

"Did you ever know a Peabody camp to close without a dance?"

"You bet not!"

"The camp is yours, boys, for tomorrow—Friday—to do with as you please for a dance," continued the old man. "Of course you'll have to stand the expenses yourselves." This was a skilful touch, for he knew well that these men would have resented anybody's paying for their fun. "And, also, of course, you'll see to it that any outsiders don't bring in any liquor, I know that."

They nodded. If he had ordered, it might have been different; but Wolf John knew his men.

"And if you fellows don't have that bunkhouse fit for the women-folks to dance in you can bet Miss Belle and the other women from the Point will have something to say to you when they show up."

For some reason John found himself moved to look at Bart when Belle's name was mentioned. Bart was smiling in a way that made John feel tight about the throat. He slipped away from the table and hurried to the office, where he sought to bury the memory of Bart's tantalizing smile in the work of compiling the final report on Main Camp's output. He had succeeded so well that he was quite ready to smash the smile against Bart's teeth if he appeared, when his uncle entered the office.

Old Peabody stood for a while looking down at the big figure bending uncomfortably over pen and paper. He saw how clumsily the pen sat in the big hand, how out of place John's thick shoulders seemed bent above a desk, and he laughed.

"John Peabody—Mud no more—that's no work for a man who can tame a camp on Christmas Day," said he. "That was a good job, John Peabody. What made you do it?"

"Do what?" said John quietly, though greatly pleased that he was "Mud no more."

"Show the booze-fighters that they couldn't take the camp to pieces even if the bosses were absent."

"Oh, that." John was embarrassed. "Why, there were your horses, and those drunken fellows were going to take them out and maybe drive them to death, and there was nobody else to take the lead in stopping them, so I couldn't hardly stand to one side and not try to do something."

The old man nodded.

"Did you stop to think that it was a mighty curious thing that the camp was left without a boss on that day?" he asked.

"Why, all the men spoke of it as a queer thing," replied John. "I supposed you didn't know that the straw-boss had gone or you wouldn't have sent for Bart to come down to the Point."

"Did you think that it was a curious thing for me to send you back here so suddenly, and to send for Bart to leave?" he asked, eying John closely. "Did you think that I might have some motive for doing that?"

"You said you wanted me to carry the message to Bart."

"And you didn't think—" the old man

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came closer and his eyes fairly searched John's thoughts—"while you were bucking those drunks you didn't think that maybe I'd done it to test you—and that it was up to you to do what you did?"

John sat up in amazement. Eye for eye he gave back his uncle's close scrutiny.

"No, sir," he said. "I never thought of that. Is that really why you did it?"

"To try you out, yes," grinned his uncle. "Hang it, John Peabody, wherever in the city did you pick up the knack of handling rough men? How did you make the sober men come and fight at your back?"

"I didn't make them," said John stoutly. "They're fine fellows, they're bricks! When they saw that I didn't have any chance against the bunch of drunks in the stable——"

"What!" The old man had him by the shoulders. "Do you mean to say you rushed that devil's gang alone?"

"I lost my head," confessed John in confusion. "It was a foolish thing to do, I know."

"Humph!" Wolf John's brow brewed storm clouds. "Bart didn't tell me that. He said you sent the men. Well, go on."

"Oh, nothing else. The men, the sober men—bricks, every one of them—came piling in, and they did the work, of course."

For many seconds old Peabody sat lost in thought, his eyes on the floor. Finally he met his nephew's even gaze.

"Bart never lied to me before, that I know of," he said slowly. "Perhaps he got it wrong from one of the men.

"Well—" the frown vanished and he looked up—"it was a risky trick to play on you, nephew, and I promise you it won't happen again. But I had to find out if you were the real thing, and Christmas Day offered the chance. In the meantime, have a good time at the dance tomorrow night.

"There'll be a different sort of one Saturday, if those Whisky Fallers have got nerve enough to make a showdown. We'll move what we need of this camp up there on sleighs.

"We ought to take it down, move it, and have it set up by Monday night. I will stay on the job until I see that done. Against the doctor's orders, I know, and Belle will scold. But I can't rest until I see with my own eyes that the fight against Jim Lowrey is started."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DANCE

THE gods in control of Winter weather were kind to the men of Main Camp and to their dance. For, while the days and nights since the coming of the cold spell on Christmas Eve had been too bitterly cold to permit of successful social diversions even to the hardened woods-people, Friday morning opened with a softness in the air that presaged coming mildness, and by nightfall the thermometer had risen until it hovered comfortably around twenty above—"one-shirt" weather, as the old-timers called it.

The men had outdone themselves in preparation for the event. In the first place, after a council of war, they had decided that as the bunk-house was to be torn down and moved next day, they had no more need for the bunks that cluttered the four walls, the cook-shack and the stables being sufficient sleeping accommodations for those too weak and decrepit to stay up a whole night.

Accordingly they had torn out the bunks to the last board, thereby doubling the dancing-floor of the room. Around the walls had been placed a row of chairs and benches. The walls themselves and the ceiling were literally hidden beneath a covering of pine boughs, cunningly interlaced, with a few buck's-heads, bear-hides and wolf-pelts hung here and there to make—as the artist responsible put it—the place "look purty and home-like."

Huge tubs of boiling water from the cook-shack, many bars of soap, and a dozen scrub-brushes muscularly wielded, had made the rough floor astonishingly clean; and all the lanterns and wall-lamps that could be begged, borrowed, bought or stolen were in place to make the room a blaze of light.

But it was on the orchestra that the men had done themselves proud. The ordinary orchestra of a woods dance, the men had decided, would not suffice for this much-to-be-talked-of celebration. They must have something special. Wherefore they had persuaded the mill superintendent's wife at Peabody Point to loan them her piano and had tenderly hauled it out to Main Camp and mounted it in a post of honor on the musician's platform at the farther end of the room.

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"We'll show a lot of high-bankers what a dance is like when this camp sets out to have one," summed up Whitey Jack. "That's the first pea-annie ever been seen at a camp dance from Quebec to Moose Jaw."

The men were prouder of the piano than of the amazing logging feats they had performed in the last four days of the camp's operation.

Bart watched the preparations for the gala event with a tolerant smile. His suddenly acquired cheerfulness and self-satisfaction were growing with every hour. He even treated John with a careless heartiness that indicated that for some reason he had decided that he had nothing to fear from him. He walked the earth now as if he had nothing to fear from any man, as if his plans were triumphant, and the sight of him filled John with wonder and fears.

His fears were increased when, on the morning of the dance, Bart, fresh shaven, dressed in new raiment from shoes to cap, with a costly bearskin coat over his arm, stepped into his cutter and drove gaily off toward Peabody Point. There was no business reason for his going, and there was only one other reason that John could imagine, and that was that he was going to drive Belle out to the dance.

John thought of the poor woman he had picked up in the road Christmas Eve, and of the bruises that Bart's hard hands had made on her pale face. Then he thought of Belle sitting beside this man on the long ride over the silent tote-road. Belle did not know that side of Bart's nature indicated by the bruised face of the woman from Whisky Falls; and Bart was a masterful man with an undeniable fascination for women.

"Hey, you, Mud!" It was Dugan who, from the cook-shack door, called John from his gloomy thoughts. "You're third next in the barber-shop. Hurry up, get aboard and get that brush scraped off your phiz for fifteen cents. Come on; no shrubbery allowed is my orders."

Dugan, being clean and skilful with scissors and razor, had turned one corner of the cook-shack into an impromptu barber-shop, and—for a price—was doing his share of making the men presentable for the dance. Norby was occupying the chair as John entered and took his seat in the waiting row and Dugan was expatiating on the toughness of the Norwegian's beard.

"They don't grow 'em that way in this country," said the cookee. "They have hair on their faces here; that ain't hair you got, Norby; them's wires."

"Cut them off, boy, and cut them good," warned Norby placidly. "I'm a good-looking man when I'm dressed up and I learned to dance all the way from Tokyo to the Barbary Coast. You give me a clean shave—Ough!"

Dugan had skilfully spilled a cup of water down his victim's spine and ducked quickly the blow that followed.

"It's too bad you're red-headed, Dugan," condoled one of the waiting men. "There's going to be some Swede girls over from the Swede settlement, and if you wasn't red-headed you might get a dance. But they run from red-heads, them yellow-haired ones do."

"Ho! Easy mark!" Dugan brandished his razor maliciously. "Trying to kid me, and me going to shave you. I pity your looks when I get through with you, boy."

In another corner of the room Whitey Jack was cutting hair. A young French Canadian was stepping into his chair.

"Fare please," said Jack holding out his hand.

"Ah ha! You teenk I pay, den you no cut mah hair, eh?" said the Canuck. "*Sacre,* no, mess-taire! You cut, den I pay."

"Just as you please, son." Jack ran his clipper straight through the thick thatch on the man's head. "Twenty-five cents, please," said he pleasantly. "You teenk I cut, den mebbe you no pay, eh? No, Canuck. You pony up now or go as you are."

"Give him to me when you're through with him, Jack," begged Dugan. "Canucks are so tight with their money it's the duty of us civilized folks to rob 'em."

"Yessir," said Whitey Jack, snipping skin and hair indiscriminately from the Canadian's skull. "A Canuck don't think any more of a quarter than he does of his old mother's right eye."

The Canadian was silent until, his haircut finished, he stood in the doorway ready to go.

"You smart man, Jack," he said smiling. "Tak' good look at dat quarter an' see what she's lak." Then he went out swiftly.

"The son-of-a-gun!" bellowed Jack, look-

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ing at the coin. "It's one of them big, old cents silvered over!"

ALL over the camp men were shaving, being shaved, having their hair cut, and otherwise preparing their persons for the dance. As evening drew on they began to array themselves in their gala attire. The sudden flare of colors from the bottom of the men's "war-bags" was a revelation to John.

Bright red woolen shirts were the most desired. Lacking this, the checked red and green "hickory" shirt was a favorite. Next came brightly colored sashes, tied tightly around the waist, the tasseled ends drooping carelessly on the left hip. A Chippewa half-breed arrayed himself in tasseled buck-skin from head to foot, and the young men of the camp were ready to slay him out of sheer, masculine jealousy.

A couple of French Canadians appeared with knives in their sashes to lend dash to their appearance, and they were promptly informed that if those knives didn't go back into their war-bags they wouldn't even be allowed to listen to the music. The informants, moreover, seemed able to back up their order, so the cutlery disappeared.

Dugan, the redness of his shirt exceeding only that of his hair, his sash as gorgeous as ever graced a French *voyageur's* waist, could not understand John's taste in arraying himself in a modest blue serge and plain white shirt.

"This is a dance, friend," he said, "not a funeral. How do you expect the girls' eyes to light up if you don't give 'em something to look at? Cheer up! Here they come."

Down the tote-road, in the complete silence of the soft evening, Dugan's sharp ears had detected the faint tinkle of sleigh-bells. Nearer and nearer the pretty tinkle came. There was a procession of sleighs and cutters.

Soon the laughter of women could be heard, rendered incredibly sweet and welcome by the sternness of the woods, and one laugh there was among them, soft and silvery, yet free, which reached in through John's bosom and tugged at his heart-strings, filling with many troubled emotions.

Then the sleighs burst out of the timber into the camp-clearing, and the rest was confusion as the men tumbled joyously forth with insistent welcome.

CHAPTER XIX

BART CEASES TO SMILE

BART drove in the lead with Belle at his side. Beneath the light of the big lantern before the bunk-house door John saw that Bart's smile was more triumphant, more offensive to him than ever.

Belle was smiling, laughing, talking, calling greetings, humming, as if the fount of young life within her were bubbling up too strongly to be controlled. As she leaped from the sleigh and sprang lightly on to the dance-floor she threw back the light shawl from her head; and then for the time being the light of the world went out for John Peabody. For Belle's great mass of dark hair was drawn back from her forehead, the heavy tresses falling in a cloud down her shoulders. And on her head gleamed triumphantly the ancient Indian head-band which Bart had attempted to present to her on the day of John's arrival at Peabody Point.

At the end of the procession Wolf John rode alone with Nels. With four or five other old men he repaired to the cook-shack where a game of poker consoled them for being too old to dance.

The music struck up instantly with the arrival of the visitors. Belle looked around as if searching for some one, and John's heart leaped as he saw her relief when her eyes fell upon his face. She ran lightly across the room to where he stood eying her gloomily. Bart frowned as he noted her action, then with a short laugh he followed leisurely after.

"Mr. Mud, what are you trying to do; hide from me?" laughed Belle, shaking John's hand. "I was afraid at first you weren't here. Come; is anything wrong? You don't look quite as happy as the rest of the men."

She came close up to him, looking him frankly in the eyes, the glorious young womanhood of her enveloping him like a flood. A month ago he would have mouthed some inane excuse for his unaccustomed lack of spirits, have changed the subject and led the conversation into the parrot-like chatter with which the polite world keeps vital things from being mentioned. He did nothing of the sort now, for already he was a different man. His big brows lowered even more blackly as he looked

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directly at her. Belle recoiled a trifle from his look; she was surprised that he could look so fierce.

"It hurts me to see you wearing that head-band—from Mr. Bart," he said quietly, and marched stolidly past her toward the door.

In the doorway he turned and saw Bart claiming her for the first dance, but he saw also that she was looking absentedly toward the doorway, her eyes large with surprise.

Out under the starlit sky John bared his head and stood with the evening chill upon his brow. A slight breeze was stirring the boughs of the few pines left standing about camp, but tonight John seemed to hear their gentle whispering as a dirge. Why had he spoken so? Why had he let her see how he had been hurt? What was he to her, anyhow? Nothing but an employee of Wolf John's, named Mud.

Dugan, the garishly dressed, came by, on his arm a laughing round-cheeked lass with two yellow braids down her back.

"Hey, Mud! Look at me," he called. "They said none of them Swedes would dance with a red-head, and here Hulda's going to dance with me all night, ain't you, Hulda?"

"Frash t'ing!" giggled the girl, striking his red head vigorously.

In the hall the waltz music was playing, and the feet were gliding noisily on the rough floor. John felt lonesome. He moved farther from the bunk-house. Other men came by and called to him. There was only one place in the camp that would be deserted and properly lonely on a night like this, and that was the little office.

John stalked moodily into the office, made his way behind the desk in the corner, and there in the darkness he dropped his arms on the desk and his face upon his arms, the first great pain of his life stabbing and wrenching at his heart.

It was a turning-point in his life, and those dark, anguished moments helped the boy to become a man.

HOW long he sat thus behind the desk John did not know. He was lost in the maze of the thoughts that were surging through his mind. Though he had left the office-door open, and the music, the laughter, the merriment of the camp came tinkling in, John did not hear. So lost in his thoughts was he that he did not hear the footsteps on the steps, or on the office floor, and did not know that two people had stepped inside the door until he heard their voices.

And when he heard them he was frozen helpless. He could not decide whether to call out, to make a noise; and so he came to play the part of eaves-dropper to Bart and Belle. Bart, too, had realized that the office was the one place in which to be undisturbed tonight.

Bart was speaking, low and passionately, as the pair came through the doorway. So near as John could determine in the dark, Belle was standing directly before the desk on which his head was resting and Bart was standing in the doorway.

"Well, Belle?" Bart's voice was brisk, confident, domineering. "You know why I asked you to come here. It's time we had a definite understanding. When is it going to be?"

There was a moment of silence, and John, scarcely breathing, forgot that he was in the position of an eaves-dropper, forgot everything in his fear of what Belle's reply might be.

"Why do you ask that tonight, Bart?" said Belle evenly.

"Because it's time to have it settled. Tomorrow we start on the King Pines job, and I want a definite promise from you as to when we are to be married. When's it going to be?"

Another silence. John could feel that Belle trembled as she placed her hand upon the desk above his head. Then she grew quiet.

"Bart, I am glad you did ask me to come here; I am glad you have decided that it is time for an understanding," she said, and her voice was quite calm. "I am sure of myself now. I don't love you, Bart; I know it now. I won't marry you—ever!"

It was a long time before Bart spoke. Then his voice was low and sinister with the same deadly menace in it as when he had threatened John on Christmas Eve.

"Belle, do you think I am the sort of man who may be played with safely?"

"No. And I haven't played with you, Bart. Do you think I am the sort to play with anything like this?"

"What do you call this? Do you think it is clever to play the flirt? What do you mean by it?"

"By what, Bart?"

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"By saying you won't marry me, when I ask you to name the date?"

"I mean," said Belle, "that I now know myself and my feelings better than I ever have in my life. I mean just what I say: I know now that I can not marry you ever."

"What!" His voice though low was like the roar of some enraged animal. "Do you think I am going to take that answer? Do you think I am the man to be fooled with like this?"

John heard him moving, cat-footed, across the floor toward her.

"You come here wearing that head-band tonight when you knew I would be expecting your answer. You lead me along; you make me feel sure that you will give me your word; and then—no! Try that with boys!"

He was standing close to her. Suddenly he reached forward and gripped her wrists.

"I won't have it, do you hear? You are going to marry me; you are, you are! I want you. I never wanted anything yet that I didn't get. You won't be an exception. Make up your mind to it; you're going to be my wife. I won't let anything stop me, not anything. Do you hear that? I never let anything stop me when I want something like I want you, not anything! Not even your own foolish thought of the moment that you can not marry me.

"Can not? You must! You've led me on too far. You can't go back on me now. I won't let you. Belle—Belle! Don't dare to play with me. You don't know what I can do if you try that. You care for me. You would not have led me on as you have, if you didn't. This is only a foolish whim of yours. It isn't going to make any difference in the end. I want your promise, and I want it tonight—now."

IN THE darkness John raised his head and gripped the edges of the desk in preparation for revealing his presence. Belle spoke calmly, but with a note of fearless command in her voice.

"Let go of my wrists, Bart. Go back to the door, or I shall leave you."

He laughed softly.

"How are you going to do it? Can you free yourself if I wish to hold you? Eh? Can you tear yourself away from me? No, you can't. Not any more than you can keep from becoming my wife."

"Now I know you, Bart," said Belle. "I suspected that this was all there was to you; just the dominant brute—now I know it. I am not a squaw; you will please release my wrists."

"You think——"

"Release my wrists."

Another moment of absolute silence; then the sound of Bart's feet moving back to the door, while John sat in awe at the fearlessness, the calmness, and the triumph of Belle.

"And I suppose—" Bart's voice was low and deadly again—"that you fancy this is all there is to it: just your own sweet will, eh? Oh, no! You'll find that my will is the one that will settle this matter. It has settled it. It settled it when you began to encourage me. I said then that you were going to be my wife, and you are."

"I'm glad that you've shown your real self to me at last, Bart," said Belle with ring in her voice. "I knew it was in you. You're strong, but that's all. And you can not make me care for you that way, and there is no man in the world can make me marry him unless I care for him. You were the only young man I knew, the only one I saw and talked to. You're big and strong; you attracted me. I didn't encourage you; it was your own insistence. You continued to come, to call on me, to try to see me at every opportunity.

"When you asked me to marry you last Fall I told you that I didn't know if I cared for you. That was the truth. When you asked me Thanksgiving Day I told you the same. It was the truth then, also. I admired you; you were so big and strong, and besides you were the only man I knew, practically. I told you then if I ever found that I cared for you enough I would come to you—and nothing could have stopped me. But I never really cared for you, Bart.

"I know it now. My eyes seem to have opened recently, and I begin to understand you. I believe the stories people have told about you—about other women. I didn't believe them before. Now I see how—how different you are from what a fine man should be—from what the man must be whom I can learn to care for. I am sorry if you are hurt, Bart, but—you ended it all when you took hold of my wrists in that woman-bullying way."

"All right." Bart's tone was openly threatening. "You've had your say, now I'll have mine. I'll tell you a little secret

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about your uncle. He isn't going to live much longer. His heart is gone. He may drop any day. When he goes I'll be the Boss Man in this neck of the woods. It's a long road from the Point down to Black Bear Lake, and I've got plenty of friends who would do anything for me—anything. Do you understand, Miss Belle? In the end—you will be glad to have me for a husband."

The desk on which John was leaning shook as Belle leaned against it, all but collapsing before his brutal announcement.

"What—what do you say?" she whispered. "Uncle John—my Uncle John—is not well?"

Bart sneered.

"Kind of takes the confidence out of you, don't it? Don't feel quite so big when there's a prospect of being left without Wolf John to take care of you, eh?"

"You're not—telling the truth, Bart," she stammered. "You're trying to scare me. Say you're only trying to scare me—please!"

"Ask him—if you want to kill him. He's hanging by such a thin thread that the shock of learning that you knew probably'd be enough to bump him off."

"You brute! Oh, Bart, what a brute you are!"

"Brute?" He laughed loudly. He no longer made any attempt at keeping any chance passer-by from hearing. "Oh, no, not a brute. Just a man who's got nerve enough to take what he wants. And before I'm through you'll be glad to have that kind of a man for your husband."

HE TURNED and went out. In the little office it was very still for a moment! Then Belle broke into stifled sobs that seemed to wrench her whole being. It was more than John could stand.

"Miss Peabody," he said rising.

"Oh! Who is it? Who is there?"

"It's I—Mud. I couldn't help it. I came here to be alone. I didn't have any chance to let you know I was here until you'd begun to talk. And then I forgot all about being an eaves-dropper. You won't forgive me, I suppose, but—but please don't take it so hard."

"Did you hear what he said?" she whispered. "That Uncle John—is it true? Mr. Mud, do you know if it is true?"

His silence answered her.

"Oh, poor dear Uncle John!" she cried in anguish.

"Don't," he begged. "Please don't. It—it isn't as bad as Bart said. At least, I don't think so."

He told her all that Wolf John had told him about the heart-specialist's report. She heard him in silence, and after a moment she had herself under control.

"Did Uncle John say he didn't wish me to know?" she asked.

"Above all things he didn't wish you to know," said John. "I don't believe I'd let him know it, Miss Peabody. It would hurt him terribly."

"I won't," she said. "Dear Uncle John! That's like him: always thinking of me. And now—what can I do to repay him for a little of his kindness to me?"

"I think you can best repay him by continuing to be yourself. I think the thing that he wishes above all is to see you going on as you have been, happy and cheerful, and as if you knew nothing about his condition. You—we must do what we can to make things as easy as possible for him, you know."

Belle held out her hand to him.

"Thank you, Mr. Mud, for saying that. I—I'll try to do my share."

"Will you also try to forgive me for sitting here without letting you know I was here while Bart and you were talking?"

She was in the doorway now and she stopped and looked up at him, her face luminous in the outside light.

"Forgive you?" she said. "I'm glad you were there. I'm glad you heard it—all of it. You—you're so different from Bart."

With that she hurried back toward the dance-hall, fearful that her absence might be remarked. As John looked after her he was sensible that something like a heavy weight had been lifted from his heart. In place of his depression there was a feeling of elation. He felt a boyish inclination to shout. His fears had all been false. Belle had not fallen under the spell of Bart's domination.

In the bunk-house he heard the music die down and the sound of dancing cease. In a few minutes another dance would be started; and Belle would hardly be dancing that dance with Bart. Determined to have the next dance himself, he hurried out of the office toward the bunk-house. Half-way he met the impetuous Dugan who was

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scurrying around, the blonde Hulda tucked securely on to his arm.

"Hey you, Mud; where you been?" he demanded. "Been looking all over camp for you. Wolf John wants you. Come on now. He's in the dance-hall and he sends me out to hunt you up and bring you there. Come on!"

IN THE dance-hall a halt had been called on the dancing. The crowd was gathered about the raised-platform at the end of the hall occupied by the musicians. John was surprised to note that the old men, who were not dancing, were present too. Nels, Norby, Whitey Jack, the mill-superintendent from Peabody Point, and other old men were up close to the platform on which John now saw that Wolf John was standing looking over the crowd. At John's entrance the old man called out:

"There he is. Step right up here, you Mud. Right up here on the platform."

John obeyed. As he stepped up he observed Belle in the front row and saw that she was fulfilling her promise of being apparently happy and cheerful. Wolf John laid his big hand on his nephew's shoulder and addressed the crowd.

"Folks, I told you that I wanted to introduce to you a man. Here he is. Most of you know something about him. You know him as John Mud. That isn't his name. I gave him that name myself. I told him that his name was Mud until I knew what kind of stuff was in him.

"Now I know, as do most of the rest of you, so now we will all begin to call him by his right name, and recognize his new position. The Peabody Logging Company is going to take in a new partner. This is the man. Folks, this is my new partner, my nephew, Mr. John Peabody!"

While the crowd still stood silent from surprise at this revelation, while broad smiles were beginning to spread over the faces of the men who had come to know John, while Dugan stood open-mouthed, Hulda still on his arm, and Belle cried out in delight, there came a bear-like growl from the outside of the circle, and Bull Bart came shouldering his way furiously through the crowd.

"So that's it, eh?" he roared when he stood before Wolf John. He looked the old man squarely in the eye, his big head thrust forward in its customary attitude of menace. "Tricked me, didn't you, Wolf John? Fooled me—just as this smart daughter of yours fooled me. Led me along, made me give you the best that was in me, and then spring this. D'you think that's safe, Peabody?"

"Easy, Bart," said the old man warningly. "Don't pull your sluice open too quick. You'd be in his shoes yourself by this time—if you hadn't dickered with Lowrey last Summer. Ah ha! You thought I didn't know about that. Oh, yes; I knew all the time. I kept you on the pay-roll because you're the best walking-boss I ever had. I keep you still for that reason only."

Bart's neck and face seemed to swell with rage.

"The —— you do!" he exploded furiously. "You think you can keep me after this? You think you're big enough man to tell me what I'm going to do? Don't you know me better'n that? I dickered with Lowrey last Summer, yes. And I'm going to dicker with him again—now. Go ahead and log the King Pines. Let's see what kind of a walking-boss your sneaking nephew makes. And let's see what kind of a fight you can put up when you start bucking against men. I could have kept the gang up there quiet for you, through Wah Song. But now I'll pay you for this night, Wolf John; you know me."

He turned to go, then stopped, looking over his shoulder at Belle. A sneer distorted his face.

"Well, well, Miss Big Bug! Not quite such a Big Bug now, eh? Not Wolf John's only heir, eh? Playing second fiddle now, ain't you? Well, well! Lucky for me I didn't marry you. But, listen: I'm still the 'dominant brute' of this neck of the woods—and don't you forget it!"

Before a hand could be raised against him or a word spoken he was at the door.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Curly Joe, Wolf John?" he called derisively. "He's up at Whisky Falls. He'll be working under me beginning tomorrow."

And Bart vanished from Main Camp as silently and swiftly as a timber-wolf racing for its cave.

Behind him there was wide-eyed consternation. Wolf John stood staring grimly at the empty doorway. John stepped down from the platform and approached Belle.

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"Will you dance this dance with me?" he whispered. As she nodded he turned to the musicians. "Here, you fellows, what are you doing—going to sleep? Start up a waltz. The dance goes on just the same."

The tension vanished. Men laughed and cheered. The music began. There was a scurrying for partners, and soon Main Camp was dancing away as merrily as if no interruption had occurred.

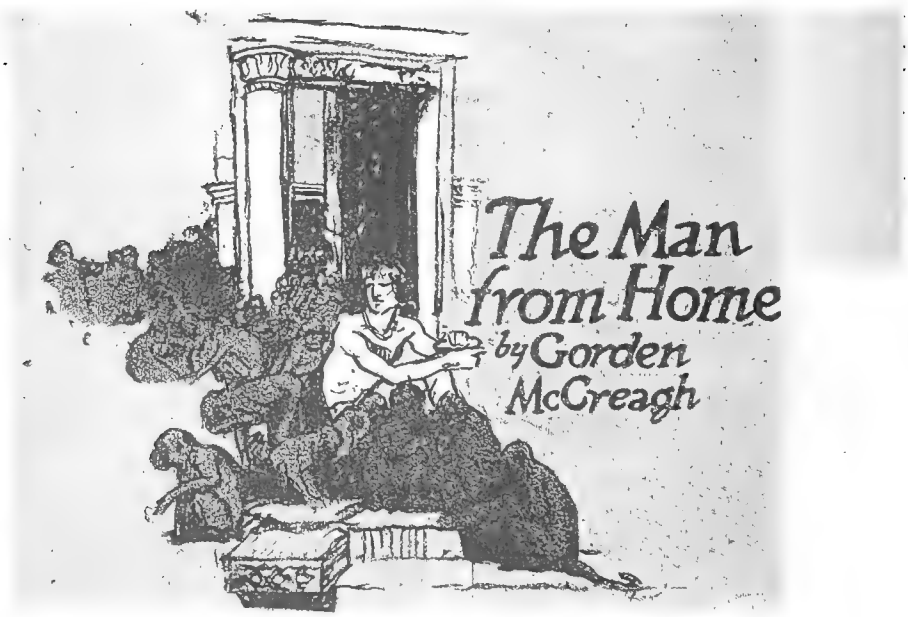
"Nels," said Wolf John presently, "you'll have to drive Miss Belle home tonight. I'm going to stay here at camp."

"No," said Nels quietly, "I don't drive her home; she can ride in one of the sleighs with the other women."

"What's that?"

"That's what I said," replied the little Norwegian stanchly. "If Curly Joe is at Whisky Falls under Bart, then Old Nels sticks close to you until this business is cleaned up."

TO BE CONTINUED



Author of "Featuring Morton St. Clair," "The Brass Idol," etc.

JIM HOLLY, known more extensively by the contraction of "Holy," because he wasn't, and because his most favored expletives were consecrated by that prefix, sat on a microscopic chair, just outside the flap of a little tent, before a diminutive table, and frowned at nothing. The chair was an X pattern folder with a green canvas seat and back; the table was to match, with a green canvas cover on willow slats, which rolled up into a beautifully compact little bundle for transportation, and when in use rolled out flat—more or less; otherwise the X people make the best and strongest and lightest camp furniture in the world, although they are located in Boston.

The tent was of green Willesden canvas—which is as waterproof as rubber and many times as lasting—and came from England. And all around, so close that the thoughtfully scowling young man could have touched it by stretching out his hand, was the greenest of thick green jungle. Altogether, the little camp blended so cunningly with its surroundings that an undesirable stranger—a forest-ranger for instance—would have had to pass very close indeed to find it. Against the green table-edge, close at hand, rested a 303 Männlicher-Schonauer rifle,

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and over a tree-limb hung a Canadian N. W. M. P. saddle.

It will be seen that this stockily built camper, with reckless good humor showing through his perplexed frown, was a strict utilitarian and chose his impedimenta with a keen eye to efficiency, quite apart from the dictates of patriotism. Practical, swift efficiency; that was the key-note of the whole camp.

The man sat so still in his intent absorbtion that a green parrot climbed like a sailor hand over hand down a flaming bougainvillea creeper and croaked at him in raucous curiosity.

The steam and the stink and the appalling stuffiness of the hot weather had just passed, and it was the beginning of the cold season in the Terai foot-hills of Upper India, the glorious, cloudless, perfect respite of three months granted by a merciful Creator before all the plagues of Egypt—which have their ancient breeding-place in India—infest the land again. Yet Holy Holly frowned and twisted up his eyebrows and scowled at no apparent cause.

Suddenly the parrot cocked its head in alert suspicion at a far-away leathery squeak and a faint metallic click. Holly's practised ear told him that some clumsy person had blundered on to a half-dry teak leaf, and, in his anxiety to recover, had knocked his rifle barrel against a bamboo stem. He grinned widely in genuine amusement; and then, seemingly awakened by the diversion, reached out one hand and groped behind the tent flap.

With a quick sinewy effort of wrist and arm, he swung a pack-saddle trunk on to the table, which groaned beneath its weight. He opened it lazily and took from it the cause of his worriment—a letter. He spread it out on the table before him, and once again his forehead corrugated in contemplative indecision.

It was a long letter, of six closely written pages, signed, "Your old Dad"; and the alpha and omega of it was, "Why don't you come home, son; for a while at least? You've wandered long enough."

Once again there came a distant snapping of twigs and a faint exclamation, and the introspective frown shaded into one of annoyance—and then cleared up into a happy smile with the coming of final decision; and the young man took paper and wrote many pages of caustic observation and amusing comment. He concluded the letter with:

> Guess you're right, Dad. The hunting game is about played out here. The game regulations are shutting down something fierce; only so they can be relaxed under "special" permits in favor of titled visitors and people with official pull. Home sounds good to me, and I'll be along some time this Winter. I don't know how as yet, 'cause I'm broke just now; but I'll surely come.

It was characteristic of the man; and his old dad, who knew his son so well, laid down the letter with a happy smile and the certain knowledge that some day the wanderer would blow in all unannounced and calm as if he had just returned from a visit to the country.

CRANDALL, the sorely harried director of the motioscope traveling company, sat in the dak-bungalow at Siliguri and ate up a considerable section of blue pencil, while he cursed all general managers and presidents with a far-embracing comprehensiveness and picturesque idiom that revealed the artist in the man. The cause of his frenzy was also a letter.

The company—just a small selection of "leads"—was touring the Far East, from Egypt to Japan, to make something new in pictures with local settings and real native actors; and he had just arranged a dramatic set of scenarios on Hindoo mythology and legendary lore, imminently satisfactory to himself, when there had come a mandate from headquarters which upset all his carefully laid plans.

The General Manager wrote to say that the tendency in the United States was now all toward making pictures of the dramatized versions of the works of popular fiction writers; and that the Motioscope Syndicate had just purchased the rights from the author—at a remarkably low figure in consideration of the difficulty of the undertaking—and he, Crandall, was forthwith to make pictures of Kipling's "Mowgli" stories. No expense was to be spared; but he must turn out sensational pictures, which would be sure to be a big hit, as nothing of the kind had been attempted before.

The director ate up some more pencil and gasped.

"Jungle Book stories!" he groaned. "How the Helen Blazes? Gosh, I'll need a traveling menagerie. Have they gone clear off

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sprocket over there?" And he sent for Herman, his camera-man, to condole with him, and perchance furnish a gleam of inspiration.

Herman listened with bewildered sympathy. He was helpful as a rule but this thing was beyond him; he did not even try to tackle it.

"Take the pictures?" he growled. "Sure I can take the pictures. I'll turn my crank on anything you stage, and guarantee good film; but you're the doctor."

He grinned cheerfully. Here was one trouble that did not affect his already overharassed life.

"What does that Muckerji Babu man say?"

Muckerji was a semi-educated Bengali, that is to say, a Babu, and typical of the breed. The hopelessly groping film-producers, strangers in a strange land, had been misguided into hiring him as a "conductor," on the futile reasoning that an educated native should surely know more about his own country than any white man. But in the East things are not as in other lands. This Muckerji was a timorous creature with an appalling vocabulary, who judged the value of words solely by their length, and flooded his employers with a grandiloquent eloquence of hastily acquired and imperfectly assimilated knowledge on matters of historic and legendary interest.

But when called upon to aid in the present circumstances he was at sea. Being a Bengali, he peopled the forests with a wild assortment of devils, and *bhooths*, and mythical beasts; and being a Babu, he naturally knew less about the jungles and their ways than the newest subaltern out from England —and he knows, God wot, little enough.

"Sir-r," he said, "this theeng is too much diffeecult. It is undertaking of gigantic magnitude. However, by difficultly acquired college education—I am failed M. A. Sir-r—I can elucidate with application of mentality——"

Crandall shut his ears and held them tight till the puffy, *pan*-stained lips ceased to move.

"Cut out the prologue, Babu, and flash just your leaders. Can you suggest anything? Now, right here; without taking a week to find out?"

The Babu's oratory sobered down; here was an argot more mystifying than his own.

"Sir-r, there is only one theeng," he confessed. "In this matter of jungles and ferocious beasts there is only one man who can advise, and that is Melvin, of Forest Department. Headquarters are at Mehter-Busti, B. N. W. Railway."

An older resident would have corrected him with, "*Mister* Melvin, you swine;" but Crandall knew no better, and accordingly to Mehter-Busti he repaired in his crying need.

MELVIN was a typical "official," strenuously devoted to duty, and therefore hidebound by precedent, and double-bound by red tape; but not a bad fellow according to the standards of his kind and creed. He fed Crandall and whisky-pegged him to profusion; but formally regretted his inability to help him.

"You can use the whole of this forest," he compensated, "and do whatever you like in it—provided, of course, that you don't overtread the usual Government regulation about violating local religious beliefs—but really, I don't see how I can help you to stage a circus; it's not in my line, you know. I shall be pleased to give you any information I can from time to time, but you'll have to wait a few days, for I have to rush off to Jagshahi to shoot an old rogue elephant who's been trampling on some of my people—one of the pleasant duties," he added with an explanatory smile.

"It's not often a fellow gets a chance of shooting an elephant, since they're protected by Government under a heavy penalty, unless they go rogue. I'm sorry I can't do more for you, Mr.-er-Crandall. Except perhaps—yes, you'd better base your operations from the dak-bungalow at Kalapani; nobody ever goes there, and you won't be disturbed."

Melvin was acting very generously according to his lights, and to a stranger withal; and Crandall thanked him warmly, but with despair in his heart, and accepted, as a stimulant, his invitation to stay to *tiffin* before starting on his long journey back.

Over the cigars Melvin volunteered, by way of making conversation:

"There's one man who could help you, Mr. Crandall, and that's Jim Holly—Holy Holly, as they call him. He has more uncanny knowledge about jungles and animals than any man I know, and he could tell you anything you wanted to know—if you could only get him."

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"Where is this Holly?" demanded Crandall eagerly. "I'll surely get him."

"I wish I knew," said Melvin mournfully. "And you surely will not get him. I've been looking for him for weeks myself. He's somewhere in my forest; and I have him pretty well hemmed in, but I might as well try to catch a flying-squirrel."

"What d'you want the poor devil so badly for?" inquired Crandall, his sympathies already aroused in favor of the one man who could possibly help him.

"Well, it's my unpleasant duty to apprehend him and send him up before the Commissioner," admitted Melvin regretfully. "I hate to have to do it, because he's quite a friend of mine during truce intervals; but he's one of those turbulent spirits who positively refuses to recognize game regulations unless they fall in with his views of justice. He's a fine sportsman and keeps the close or natural breeding seasons strictly; but anything else——"

The accompanying gesture was indicative of despair.

Crandall's American ideas of liberty did not readily lend themselves to a conjecture on any other conceivable restrictions.

"What other regulations are there?" he asked, mystified.

"Well, in this particular instance," replied Melvin, "we're expecting a visit from Count Von Ziegenbock, and the order has gone out from the Lieutenant Governor that there's to be no shooting of big game in this forest at all, so that he can have a fresh field. Whatever my own opinion of the orders may be, it is my duty to enforce them."

Here was the stern, incorruptible British official who made a display of his integrity.

"This Holly, of course, came over and made formal declaration of war; after which he coolly borrowed a box of cartridges. And he's been devastating the country-side ever since."

"And I'm darned if I blame him!" exploded Crandall hotly; but Melvin only smiled and maintained inexorably that it was his duty to get him.

"I've got all possible exits pretty carefully watched," he insisted. "And he can't get away."

Crandall entered upon a warm defense of this lone champion who defied an autocracy; but Melvin merely shrugged his shoulders non-committally; and Crandall wended his way back to his little flock, invoking with one of his best flights the vengeance of all the *bhooths* in all the jungles upon the demented and ignorant rulers at home who so lightly set him to produce such an impossible set of pictures, thinking apparently that his mere presence in India was quite sufficient.

However, he had become director of the traveling company through an enviable reputation of being a man who could accomplish things, and it was up to him; and he cursed soulfully again at the thought.

A FEW days later Crandall, and Herman the camera-man, and Tracy the leading actor, who had sallied forth from the Kalapani dak-bungalow to try and shoot something for the family pot, suddenly found themselves the bewildered center of a cyclonic disturbance composed of a mob of howling jungle villagers.

None of the three understood a word of Gamari, which is the scornful name given to the language of these semi-apes, and means, "idiot talk," or of Hindustani, which some of the *junglis* might have understood; and they were amazed at the sudden attack. The menacing attitude of the mob, which circled around them with lowering brows and chattering noises, armed with the inevitable *lathi*, or club, needed no explanation, however, and the white men drew defensively together.

They were almost deluded into the indiscretion of firing a shot "to frighten them," after the prescribed procedure in books of travel; which would have been the signal for the shrieking dispersion of the rabble, who afterward would have produced corpses by the half-dozen before a buffalo-faced native magistrate and sworn in concert to having been attacked, all unprovoked, with field-guns, and given the native press another opportunity to froth about white brutality.

Herman was already fingering his gun nervously, when an alert, hawk-eyed young man in a khaki Norfolk-jacket and riding-breeches strode on to the scene and shouted a sharp command in the dialect.

"It is *Polis-wallah!*" cried the mob leaders and drew back, expecting at least arbitration if not justice.

The command had evidently meant "disperse," for on the bellowing herd drawing together and standing threateningly with lowered heads like so many cattle the man

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rushed at them with his empty hands, and they fled incontinently before his wrath. He grabbed an individual who appeared to be some sort of head-man and sternly demanded an explanation.

"Sahib," protested the man with a certain defiant justification in his tone, "they were shooting at peacocks!" And a chorus of angry assent came from the uncouth forms lurking at a safe distance among the trees.

"It is well," snapped the authoritative white man curtly. "Make proper report of the matter at the *thana* and cease from creating tumult here. Begone all of you. Beat it!" And he propelled the head-man violently from him with his foot. Then he turned to the relieved trio.

"Say," he demanded wearily, "don't you babes in the wood know any better than to go shooting peacock in this district? Have you never heard that they're sacred, and that people like you have been beaten to death with *lathis* for that very reason?"

"Look here, officer," began Crandall in explanation.

The man grinned expansively.

"Oh, can that, fellers," he drawled. "I'm no crawling policeman. But the bluff went all right, didn't it?"

He chuckled delightedly and looked around with engaging good humor. There was no mistaking that dialect and that accent. Crandall held out his hand impulsively.

"Say," he joyfully guessed, "that's the pure prattle of the little old burg. You're from home, aren't you?"

"Sure I'm from home!" conceded the forceful impostor, as he shook the proffered hand as that of a long-lost brother. "And a darn long way from home," he added with a wry twist of his face, as he remembered that, so far from getting back, according to his written promise, he was compelled to devote his whole energies for the present to getting safely out of that particular district.

"MY NAME'S Crandall," the director introduced himself. "And this is Mr. Tracy, and Mr. Herman." He looked inquiringly at the other, obviosuly expecting a reciprocation.

"Well," said the cheerful stranger, "since you're all allies, so to speak, in an enemy's country, I don't mind admitting that my name is Holly, Jim Holly, at present a fugitive from British Justice—with a capital J." He said it as if he had been convicted of highway-robbery.

Crandall lifted up his hands to Heaven and crowed in ecstatic thanksgiving.

"Holy crumbs!" ejaculated Holly. "What ails the man?"

"A gift!" chanted Crandall. "A gift direct from Heaven! This is my reward for living a pious life. You're the only man in the universe who can help me—Melvin told me so."

"Good for Melvin!" remarked Holly dryly. "But I'm kinder put to it to help myself just now."

"But he's after your scalp, horse, foot, and guns," added Crandall warningly.

"Do I not know it!" snorted Holly. "The landscape is fairly sprouting with his rangers. But for why the advertisement?"

Crandall took him by the arm, like a man trying to hang on to a lovely dream, and led the way back to the dak-bungalow, "to celebrate," and explained as they went.

"Fellers," began Holly when the director was but half-way through, "I'm real sorry. But it's close season with me just now, and I've got to lie so low that I just daren't go rushing 'round through the jungles with you to——"

And then he came in view of Miss Helen Redfern, the star of the company, standing on the dak-bungalow steps and watching anxiously for their return; and Holy Holly changed his mind with speed and precision, and suffered himself to be led forward and introduced. For rangers were paltry considerations after all. And danger? He had slept with it for many weeks. He should permit his soul to be vexed?

Later, over refreshment, Crandall concluded his tale of woe and wound up with:

"You see, I'll need a young menagerie; wolves, and elephants, and bears, and things. You know the story, don't you?"

Holly nodded and quickly had a suggestion.

"Wolves," he said. "Have you ever seen a Deccan wolf? Well, what about these jungly village dogs? They're the same thing, except that they haven't got bushy tails. Now why can't you doctor up their tails with spirit gum and crêpe hair?"—Where did this amazing man's knowledge of make-up come from?—"You wouldn't know the difference yourself when you were through."

Crandall gasped as he saw his way clear

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in a flash. He surely could. And Miss Redfern, who was known as Red Squirrel by reason of the glorious auburn of her hair, clapped her hands and squealed with merriment at the idea. This man was certainly an acquisition.

Crandall hastened to annex him to his staff with the lure of a perfectly fabulous remuneration; and Holly, with an eye to the distant prospect of his return home—which was inevitable destiny now since he had written it—and all his surplus vision on the altogether delightful profile of the Squirrel, solemnly assured Crandall that his arguments had convinced him that his fate for the present lay with the company. He suggested that if he were given a couple of coolies he would guide them to his hidden camp and transfer his belongings to the dak-bungalow.

The cunning retreat must have been quite close, for he was back within a couple of hours; and the tender-feet looked with astonishment on the light, compact little bundles which comprised the practical camper's outfit, all of which was a revelation to them.

"Gee, that's slick," admired Tracy. "Cunningest fixings I ever saw. But what are these two long curved things wrapped in gunny-sacking? They're heavier than all the rest of your outfit."

"Those?" said Holly with a far-away smile. "Those are the tusks of a certain elephant that Melvin's looking for up at Jagshahi. Had my eye on him for a long while."

Crandall whooped. This man was becoming more astonishing every minute.

THE next day was devoted to an earnest discussion of ways and means, and adaptations, and plans for procuring the rest of the live "properties" which would be necessary for this finest film ever made. Crandall sang about his work and attacked the problem with enthusiasm. His load of despair had miraculously vanished with the Heaven-sent advent of this purposeful young man with the engaging smile. The most important consideration, since the wolves had been provided for, was of course Mowgli's three other inseparable companions, Bagheera the black leopard, Kaa the great rock python, and, most important of all, old Baloo the big brown bear who taught the Law of the Jungle.

"Ah, yes, old Baloo," reflected Holly. "A nice fat bear now. That's difficult. Hagenbeck's agent at Calcutta was willing to give me three hundred rupees for a bear any time—and the old robber would get five for it later."

"I'll go the limit," cried Crandall joyously. "The Syndicate has saved so much money in buying the picture rights that I have carte blanche here."

"All right," said Holly quietly. "I'll go out and get one. May be gone a couple of days; and you people can utilize the time prospecting around for dog-meat."

They laughed happily at the jest. They were ready to laugh at anything that day in the lightness of their hearts.

But not long after it was found that Holly had mysteriously disappeared. And he did not come back that night; nor the next day. Crandall's heart began to sink. A horrible suspicion came to him that his godsend had been surprised by Melvin's men; though somehow that did not seem possible—as well surprise a young panther—and he sought confirmation from his colleagues.

ON THE third morning the Red Squirrel, who was standing in the veranda, shrieked and brought the men rushing to her side.

Out from the edge of the clearing came striding Holy Holly arm in arm with a huge brown bear, which swayed and shuffled along by his side on its hind legs.

Melvin was right. This Holly was positively uncanny!

He walked triumphantly up to the veranda-steps, where he smote his grim companion on the nose. The bear thereupon dropped to all fours and grumbled at being held by the ear.

"What the—where—how in thunder?" stammered the astonished film heroes.

"Some wizard! Eh?"

Holly grinned all over his face at their bewilderment. Then he tied the great beast to the veranda post—a ring through its nose and a cord were now apparent—and came up among them chuckling softly to himself.

"You city-fellers are a real treat to me," he grinned. "You look as if I was Elijah reproducing the 'Bald Head' incident. This thing is easy. India's full of performing bears and I just had to circle around till I found one; its man'll be along presently.

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You can't buy it, because he loves it better than his wife, and sleeps with it, and it's as tame as an old cow; but he's hired for thirty cents a day."

"Well, if that don't beat creation!" murmured Crandall weakly.

"And I heard of a fellow who's got a black leopard," continued Holly. "Just the thing you want; and same way, any traveling snake-charmer will sell you a tame python."

"What I want to know," exploded Crandall, "is why that —— Babu couldn't tell us some of these things."

Holly viewed the idea with derision.

"If you knew the Bengali Babu, you wouldn't want to know. It can't think spontaneously; all it's good for is routine work—and it can carry out an order, if it's very clear. Your particular jewel can best be employed rounding up the leopard-man and a snake-charmer or two."

HERMAN had been fidgeting with his boxes with professional ardor for the last two days, cleaning and oiling and testing, and then cleaning again, and was clamorous to begin work in the strong, steady light that held unvaryingly from day to day.

And then came a hitch. Tracy suddenly exhibited wild alarm as an awful thought flashed into his mind, and he sought Crandall with desperation and defiance in his face.

"See here, Crandall," he began, "who's slated to take the Mowgli part? Those great beasts may be as affectionate as fleas; but if you think I'm going to gambol with them all naked through the jungles, you're on the wrong line; ring off!"

"But my dear Tracy," Crandall shrieked, "who else is there? We've positively got nobody else."

"Get a black," grunted Tracy obstinately. "And besides, I'm too tall for the Mowgli part."

Crandall almost wept.

"Don't talk like a bicycle pump, Tracy. We'd have to rehearse him for a million years, and then he wouldn't begin to do."

But Tracy was obdurate. Nothing would induce him to do a Christian-martyr act to make a New York holiday. It was a deadlock. Crandall looked instinctively to Holly for help; he had learned to regard him as infallible.

"What 'bout dis chile?" suggested Holly. "I've never acted pictures, but I'll try anything once."

"Would you?" said Crandall eagerly, with a touching faith—which he did not himself understand very well—in the other's ability to make good in whatever he attempted. "D'you think you could make up for it?"

Holly smiled slowly.

"I could be ready in just about fifteen minutes."

Without further questioning, Crandall forcibly pushed him into the room that acted as a dressing-apartment.

Just fifteen minutes later a perfect figure of a native youth emerged, dressed in a crooked knife and the scantiest of loincloths.

Herman jumped up and gurgled over him speechlessly, and Crandall stepped back and regarded him with his now customary amazement.

"But where did you get the stuff?" he marveled. "What make-up is this?"

Holly grinned again. He took an almost boyish delight in these dramatic surprises.

"When my biography is written," he announced, "by one of the leading philosophers of the age, you fellers'll see that I've had to make up as a native more than once; and so I wouldn't be found out either."

HERMAN was snorting with impatience to go out and make some trial film, and aided by the equally willing Crandall he dragged the venturesome new star off to where the bear and its keeper together growled defiance at a small pack of gaunt village dogs, which spent the intervals between barking and snarling in trying to chew spirit gum and crêpe hair off their tails. Scenery, of course, was all around them and Herman already had in his mind's eye an ideal little nook only a few hundred yards distant where he thirsted to make the most sensational wolf pictures ever seen.

The actual posing was surprisingly easy. The dogs lolled naturally about this most natural Mowgli's feet; and Herman bubbled over with enthusiasm as he clicked off foot after foot of gorgeous film. The light was perfect and the realism inimitable. Mowgli raised his enthusiasm a little later to a pitch of frenzy by inciting a most inspirited fight among a group of the largest and fiercest of his wolves.

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Crandall moaned in ecstasy, as if it hurt him.

"Gosh, it's all in knowing how," he admired, and then swore in polyglot at the recollection of Muckerji Babu's resultless vaporings. He joined his voice to Holly's to urge the wolves to still greater efforts and shouted aloud in sheer light-heartedness.

And then, in the middle of the joyous clamor, his jaw suddenly dropped and his eyes started from his head, as the very soul chilled within him.

Nemesis had fallen!

Through the trees rode Melvin of the Forests, with his head-ranger behind him.

Crandall was paralyzed; but Mowgli coolly set to quell the wolf-fight with kicks and shrill native abuse, and drew aside with the bear-keeper while the sahibs conversed.

Melvin's first words were reassuring.

"Well, how are you people getting on?" he greeted. "I was just over at the house looking for you."

"And for me," thought Holly quickly. "I'll bet he's heard something and come to investigate."

Crandall recovered his wits sufficiently to explain how their plans were progressing, and Herman had to demonstrate how film was produced, a novelty in which Melvin was much interested; and he stayed an interminable time talking about pictures he had seen—two-year-old releases by the time they reached India. Crandall's nerves were giving way under the strain, and he felt that he would have to scream aloud every time that Mowgli would approach with a sly grin of refined diabolism and shoo the wolves away from sniffing around the sahib's feet.

Finally Melvin mounted again, and after talking for several more excruciating minutes, he rode off slowly. Then he suddenly turned and came back, and Crandall's heart climbed up into his throat where he could taste it.

"I hear you had some turn-up with the natives," Melvin stated in his official manner. "You must be careful, you know. That's the one thing the Government will not tolerate, Mr. Crandall. I have to warn you about that." And he trotted off once more.

With reckless effrontery, Mowgli ran after him and called, "Sahib, *backsheesh do*. Will the Excellency see the bear dance?"

But Melvin rode on without taking any further notice.

Crandall mopped the cold perspiration from his forehead and reviled Holly murderously for the repeated shocks to his nervous system.

"Close call, wasn't it?" remarked that irresponsible coolly. "He's sure heard some *talkee-talkee* and come over to explore. But I guess he's satisfied we're all innocent citizens now. And so the Government won't stand for disturbances, hey?—Hm!"

After the establishment of this clean bill of health Holly felt that he could move about more freely, and arrangements advanced swimmingly; but in spite of this progress he was observed to pause from time to time and frown thoughtfully. Perhaps he was regretting that the sooner the series of pictures would be finished the sooner would the Red Squirrel pass from his sight. Who knows? The Babu returned from his errand with a small army of embryo animal-trainers, and news of more to follow.

The native of India loves to catch and cherish some live thing, and word having gone forth of a lunatic party of sahibs, they came in malodorous droves, with an appalling assortment of strange beasts and birds, which they tried to sell, at first at exorbitant prices, and later for anything they could get.

But the leopard-man was crafty, and held out for an awful hire, till Holly discovered that the Babu had told him that his animal was a necessity, and proposed to go shares on the profits. A fine big python also was secured, like film, at so much per foot—and the owners stretched it villainously in the measuring—a live snake is an astonishingly elastic beast. With the principals at hand, several more pictures were taken of Mowgli and his three companions, to Herman's imminent contentment; for Holly pushed and buffeted the beasts into the desired poses with the utmost sang-froid; but then, as Crandall said, it was all in the knowing how.

Crandall too now began to notice Holly's spasms of thoughtful preoccupation, figuring out new wonders, doubtless; and he commended his immaculate paragon's zeal. And then one day Holly smote his thigh and shouted aloud with merriment, and thought carefully a little more; and chuckled ventriloquously to himself; and then went straightway and hunted up Crandall.

"Say, Crandall," he declared persuasively, "there's one scene you ought to

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pull off while the chance lasts, and that's the part where Mowgli has been carried off by the monkey-people, and then Baloo and the other two rescue him, and they have the great battle with the 'Bandar Log.' Some sensational picture that!"

"You bet," agreed Crandall. "But I don't see how we're going to fake it."

"I know *the* stage set for it. An old temple of Hanuman, with great moss-grown steps, and a marble terrace, and a cracked water-tank, and carved pillars, and snakes, and scorpions, and millions of monkeys, and—ooh gorgeous stuff! And it isn't so far either."

Holly's description fired the director's appreciation for scene, and he called Herman to listen to it all over again.

"Gosh!" muttered the camera-man. "Are there such places as that?"

"Sure," said Holly. "Come and see."

CRANDALL was persuaded, and the three set out forthwith. A short hour's walk brought them to the outer remains of an ancient civilization; and presently there burst on their view a row of pink marble pillars, weather-worn and stained with great purple cracks, and trellised with the vivid green of the bitter *karela* creeper.

"Gosh!" murmured Herman. "What a picture!"

"Didn't I tell you?" exulted Holly in a whisper, even his careless irreverence subdued by the beauty of the scene. "But come and see the rest."

It was even as he had described. A wide terrace with moss growing between the marble flags—the typical terrace where Mowgli had sat with the monkey host all around him—and a green scummy pool with pink lotus growing in it.

"This is *it!*" enthused Crandall. "This is *the* place where it all happened. Great jimminy, we'd have the picture of the age if we could only half-way fake up something."

"Leave it to me," said Holly with confidence.

They both eyed him doubtfully.

"Leave it to me," insisted Holly again mysteriously. "All you have to do is to get your tripods and boxes and things fixed up, and I'll arrange for all the monkeys in the world this very afternoon."

"Fine!" commented Crandall caustically. "But how?"

"I'll *call* 'em," announced Holly enigmatically. "I'll show you city-fellows some jungle magic. But at four o'clock sharp, mind; I can't work it any other time."

The man talked impossibilities and Crandall and the camera-man looked at him with derision. But he spoke with easy confidence and he had certainly demonstrated his ability to accomplish wonders in the past.

They decied to take a chance, for they were both hypnotized with the gorgeous possibilities of the scene, though they could imagine no conceivable way of working it. But Holly wrapped himself in mysterious silence all the way home, and the only answer he would give to all their inquiries was:

"You leave it to me. I'll show you. You get together all your props and be there by four sharp. I'll put on my make-up and come right back—to make my magic," he added with a grin.

SHORTLY before four, Crandall and the camera-man, and Tracy who came as a skeptical spectator, and Baloo and the rest of them arrived on the deserted scene.

"E. Z. Marks and Co." scoffed Tracy. "He's kidded you to beat the Dutch."

But Crandall loyally upheld his paragon, in pite of his saner judgment; and Herman moodily set up his instruments.

But there was wizardry in the air. Soft shufflings and low crooning calls from the tree-tops above their heads. Crandall gripped Tracy by the arm.

"My God!" he whispered hoarsely. "Look at the monkeys. The trees are swarming with them!"

It was so. High among the branches lithe brown shapes leaped and chattered and moaned plaintively by hundreds.

On the stroke of four Holly appeared suddenly from no where, looking wild in his Mowgli make-up.

"Are you all ready?" he whispered. "Well, I'll fetch 'em down; and when I call, you just sick Baloo and the bunch on, and you'll see Kipling's story as it was—and if I get bitten in the general mix-up I'll soak you for the doctor's bill."

He glided away and presently reappeared among the columns with a wreath of marigolds around his neck and a priest's bowl in his hands. He walked slowly to the center and squatted down on the bare flags and muttered occultly. Then suddenly he lifted

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his arms once to the tree-tops and began to rock his body to and fro, and broke into a wierd chant in minor fifths with a long tremulous call between each cadence.

And from the tree-tops the monkeys answered him. They slid down the tall trunks in droves; old gray fathers, and soft-eyed mothers, and mischievous youngsters by the hundred, and came trooping up all about him, eager and unafraid. What necromancy was this? Herman reeled off his film steadily but with his breath coming in gasps. The monkeys took no notice of the unsanctified picture-people, but trooped round their Mowgli, picking at his flowers and his loin-cloth and chattering querulously.

Then suddenly Mowgli rose to his feet.

"Sick 'em on!" he yelled all unmystically, and called his pets to him.

Baloo waddled up the steps and the superb panther bounded gracefully after him; and both disappeared instantly in a wave of monkeys. The great beasts grumbled and complained indignantly, and the hordes of monkeys pinched and chattered and pulled at them, and leaped up and down on all fours on the flags and howled. And Herman danced behind his camera and howled with them; for he was getting the most wonderful picture ever filmed. And then, all of a sudden, there rose wilder and more uncouth howls all around them, and a mob of yelling natives surrounded them as once before.

Holly shouted aloud with joy.

"Look out!" he called with an inexplicable exultation in his tone. "Keep together. I'll attend to this bunch."

The amazing man seemed to have considered even this contingency, for without hesitation he seized the indignant Baloo by the scruff of the neck and rushed him at the nearest group of natives.

As the great bear and the wild-looking man bore down on them, they, who would have beaten the white men with clubs, broke and fled incontinently. Holly shouted with glee and charged the next group, and scattered them like frightened rabbits; and so on to the last. The fat old bear seemed to enter into the spirit of the game as much as he did, and together they chevvied them till not a man was left in sight. Weak with laughter, Holly returned to the bewildered film-fakers.

"Now then," he commanded briskly, "let's hustle and get home before they gather again."

On their way home he kept in fits of laughter, and in reply to their amazed inquiries only urged them to greater speed. It was not till they were safe in the dak-bungalow—where for some further mad reason he insisted on keeping on his make-up—that he condescended to explain.

"Holy Gee! You fellers are as good as taking the kids to a circus," he chuckled with tears in his eyes. "Listen how easy it is back of the scenes. Those monkeys are the sacred apes of Hanuman, and an old priest keeps up the custom of feeding them every day at four o'clock. It was easy to bribe the miserly old gink to let me take his place for the sake of the pictures, though I kinder hesitated to tell him the second part of the program. Monkeys of course will go for anything if there are enough of them; and as for old Baloo chasing the natives, why these bear-men train their beasts to chevvy them so as to carry the bluff of being ferocious man-eaters. Magic ain't so difficult when you know how. Eh, Crandall? But *some* picture old sport, not?"

"You bet, some picture!" enthused Herman, and would have embraced him.

That night the company slept the sleep of the just with the consciousness of work well done.

THE morning broke fair and cloudless, and with it came Melvin once again, like a bolt out of the blue sky. But it was no social call this time. He was stern and inexorable.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Crandall," he announced. "But I have telegraphic orders, and it is my duty to carry them out. I warned you twice about violating local religious customs, and yesterday's affair is the culmination. The whole district is clamoring for redress, and I have orders to send you away."

Crandall was thunderstruck. He strode nervously up and down, clasping and unclasping his hands; and spent an hour promising not to transgress again, and arguing, and finally pleading; but it was of no use. Melvin had his orders; and as an incorruptible officer of the Government it was his duty to obey.

"I'm really sorry, Mr. Crandall," he insisted. "But I must escort you out of the district."

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"There's no need to escort us like criminals,'" growled Crandall moodily. "We'll go by ourselves."

"Oh, it's not that," Melvin hastened to explain. "But—" wearily—"my rangers are still looking for this Holly man, and they wouldn't let anybody through."

There was some small gleam of comfort in the reflection of how lucky it was that Holly had kept on his wonderful Mowgli make-up.

And then, late in the day, when Melvin had safely escorted the depressed little troupe with its beasts and baggage far beyond his lines and deposited them before the next dak-bungalow, and when his horse had finally disappeared in a cloud of dust, Holly sank to the ground and wept with silent mirth.

"Great Gosh!" growled Herman savagely. "Ain't there nothing you don't laugh at? You make me sick." And even Crandall was irritated into expostulating that there was a time for everything, and this was surely no time for laughter.

"Fellers," confessed the crafty diplomat from his position on the floor, "I've played it low-down mean on you. I figured on this. I figured Melvin would put us out, and I played for it. That district had got too hot to hold me and I couldn't see any other way out. I knew there'd be a rumpus with the black men over that picture if we got up a fight with their monkeys, and from what Melvin said before I felt pretty darn sure that the outraged majesty of the Government would give us a personally conducted tour off the premises. Forgive me; but I've got to laugh on Melvin."

Crandall was too weary and disheartened even to fell any resentment. He went heavily to the house, and the others followed. And that night Holly disappeared.

THE next two days were appalling in their depression. Crandall did not know where to turn. He was like a ship that had suddenly lost its rudder in the middle of a splendid passage; and the Babu's fatuous incompetence was accentuated by their recent meteoric progress. The men discussed Holly's conduct with deep disapproval, as disheartened men will, and agreed that it was surely low-down mean to leave them in the lurch like that as soon as he himself was safe; and the only one who could be found to defend him was the Red Squirrel.

Why, she argued, what claim had they on him? He had to look after his own interests. And he had obtained pictures for them which they never would have got otherwise. And so warmly did she uphold him that Crandall was converted once more to a less-selfish view of the matter.

And then on the second evening the man himself appeared, travel-stained, but fizzling with energy; and his first words made the others feel ashamed.

"I've fixed us up, fellers," he announced. "I've just come from the Rajah of Basouni —friend of mine—shown him some good shooting at odd times. He's got a whole zoo full of animals, elephants and tigers and things; and he says we can take all the pictures we want on his private estate; says he'll be pleased to have us, and see how it's done."

Crandall realized this amazing man's usefulness more forcibly than ever after the recent horrid conviction that he had lost him, and he hastened to bind his interests with the company for good.

"Say, Holly," he proposed on the spot, "you told me that you'd wandered 'round Borneo and Java and the Treaty Ports generally. How about coming with us as general manager and conductor for the rest of the season, and then home?"

"Home?" said Holly and a slow smile lighted his eyes.

"Home!" And he looked at the Red Squirrel's altogether delightful profile again as she gazed with forced unconcern out of the window.

"Guess it suits my plans!"

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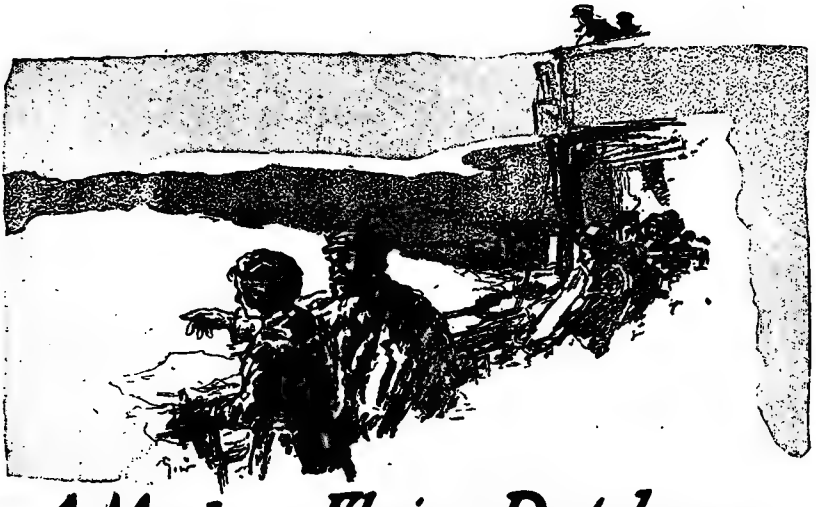

A Modern Flying Dutchman

by Wilbur Daniel Steele

Author of "The Stone Man," "Storm," etc.

THIS is the story of a man who was a very great criminal in the eyes of the laws of all the Seven Seas. Whether he should be deemed a sinner or not I should not undertake to judge.

But first of all comes the tale of another man—a friend, and a gallant officer—who, for a moment, was afraid of things which no man in this day ought to fear.

The officer was Captain George Dunton, U. S. R. C. S., at the time commanding the revenue cutter *Cosimo*, on which I was serving as first officer. A rumor had come to us at Honolulu, and now we were off six hundred miles to the westward, steaming down the long outer chain of low-lying sand islands. Somewhere in this desolate group, if that rumor might be trusted, the poachers were at it again, killing the plumage birds which the Government at Washington says may not be killed.

Four months before we had shut up Okai, the Jap, in a federal prison. But it seemed there were others beside Okai, and because of these others we were now passing through vacant, perfect days, and grumbling at the fortune which had sent us away from the Island Capital at the very height of the season.

I pass over the empty weeks and come to the end of the quest. We had covered almost the entire length of the chain, sending a fruitless boat-party ashore at every islet. All of this last day the world had been filled with an indescribable suffusion of diamond dust, the glowing, radiant voice before of the "rains."

We picked up an island about four o'clock in the afternoon—no more than a flaw in the pearly skyline. A little after five, Dunton came up to me on the bridge—I had the deck that afternoon watch. He carried a pair of glasses and spoke with the calm dispassion of a man who wants to shout, to fling his hat in the air.

"I should say we had them at last, Arndt," he said.

He handed me the glasses and pointed toward the approaching islet. A diaphanous, upstanding blur appeared in the center of the blended lenses. Even as I watched it, a patch of light sprang out athwart the webbed thing—a sail had been broken out on the faraway ship. The vessel was lying in a little land-locked cove; over a narrow spit of sand I could make out a small boat hurrying back and forth between the beach and the ship.

"They're crazy," Dunton muttered, "to think of running with that old wind-jammer. I wonder what they're up to."

He gazed at the western sky, then hummed uneasily. The sun sank down, red,

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tremendous, distorted to the shape of a pear, while we watched the quarry, always larger and beginning now to move slowly along the ridge of the sand spit.

"I wonder——" Dunton repeated, and something in his tone made me wonder too and look up toward the zenith.

I HAVE served seven years in those waters, and I never knew the rains to come on as they did that year. The sun died, rather than set, and immediately the whole bowl of the waters became filled with an uneasy mist, mysterious, self-created, crushing. I pitied Dunton. The *Cosimo* was his first command; he was very young for the rank.

"I will relieve you, Mr. Arndt," he said finally. The formality of it betrayed him.

He moved the needle of the indicator and far below I caught the answering clang in the engine-room. We were at half speed. I had not noticed till now how hot it was. After what seemed hours of this a man was sent into the chains with the lead. We had nothing to do but anchor for the night. The man's drone rose to us in monotonous formula—a voice disembodied.

Then of a sudden we heard him scream.

I will confess that panic laid hold of me. There is something terribly nerve-racking in a man's scream. In a daze I heard the clangor of "collision quarters," Dunton's sharp "hard astarboard" to the helmsman, and the men tumbling up from below.

The darkness on our starboard bow seemed to drain itself into a huge core of blackness, growing larger every moment. We stood like men frozen, and watched that sinister shadow mount over our heads, and we sweat cold in the caldron and waited. And no shock came.

I heard a click behind me. A great white light flared out around us; the magnesia torches above the boats had been fired, and there before our eyes sprang up a world of canvas, dingy sails towering in serried ranks into the black sky. My eyes dropped to the hull that was slipping past our side, seams gaping wide, rusty paint peeling in great patches. Dazed eyes peered blankly from moist brown faces over the rail; here and there a glistening brown arm was held rigidly erect. The door of the cabin house across the deck slid back, and in the black, rectangular frame stood the face of a white man.

It was all over in a moment, and the stranger had slipped out of the white circle. The magnesia burned steadily. I turned to Dunton for the expected order, but the sight of his face staggered me as if it had been a blow.

"For Heaven's sake——" I started.

"Did you see that man?" he asked, in the colorless accents of mechanical speech. "That man has been dead twelve years."

I stared without comprehension.

"And that ship——" he went on. "I sailed in that ship for four years. Her name was the *Priscilla Danger*. She was lost on the night of the seventeenth of September, twelve years ago."

As if to put a period to his words, the magnesia crackled, sputtered and went out. We stood together in the dark, I waiting, he silent. I knew that the crew must be wondering.

"Beg pardon, sir," I ventured, "was there any order?"

"Order?"

"Dunton!"

I grasped his wrist and whispered in his ear, for the quartermaster was six feet away—

"For Heaven's sake, man, what's the matter?"

His arm was limp. In the gloom I saw a little circle of white outlining the pupil of each eye.

"Did you—did you see—it—too?" he chattered.

I TOOK him by the shoulders and walked him before me to the door of the chartroom, opened it with the crook of my elbow, and let him drop sprawling on the cushioned transom. There was no time, just then, for even the mock of discipline. Back on the bridge, I spoke sharply to the quartermaster.

"I have relieved the Captain, who is ill," I said. "Put the helm astarboard."

We picked up the stern of the stranger some twenty minutes later—a nebulous panciling on the smothered radiance of our searchlight. She hove to at our shouted command, and I sent a boat's crew aboard in command of our third lieutenant with orders to bring off any whites that might be on her; also to leave enough men there to hold her during the night. Then I stepped into the chartroom.

Dunton was sitting up now. He had

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evidently shaken himself together somewhat. I touched the brim of my cap.

"Your orders have been carried out, sir," I said, without a shift in my voice. "The chase is hove to, and I have sent Mr. Gabriel aboard. He will bring the master back with him."

He nodded, in formal recognition, and commenced to give orders for the night, but broke off in the middle of them.

"Arndt, that was a queer turn I had. Do you know, I would have sworn it—but it was some sort of mist a—hallucination, of course. I'll see them in the cabin."

He went aft and disappeared in the cabin companion. Thither, a few minutes later, I ushered the two whites who came over the side from Gabriel's boat—a woman and a man. The woman was a little ahead of me and her feet were already on the companion stairs, when I remembered that I had not yet asked the master's name.

So when the two of us entered the cabin, Dunton was offering her a chair. She was a woman toward middle age, inclined to be plump, scarcely handsome but comfortable and good looking. Her placid gray eyes gave the key to her whole personality. She sat down, produced a piece of work from her bosom and began knitting. One could imagine her as knitting at the same article when the alarm of us first rang over the decks of the ship.

"Captain Joseph Perry, of the *Southern Cross*," I announced.

Dunton turned and his face went white again. But when he spoke his voice was laboriously tranquil.

"I think you have made a mistake, Mr. Arndt. You meant to say, 'Captain Perry Hanum, of the *Priscilla Danger*.'"

The two faced each other: Dunton tall, spare, pale, young; Hanum squat, bronzed, with a square gray beard and nervous wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. After Dunton's words, neither man spoke for a moment. Then I saw Dunton's hand move to the brim of his cap, which he had forgotten to take off. The other returned the salute.

"Is that you, Dunton, my boy?" he queried, squinting his eyes against the light. "Me, of all the world, to run into you, of all the world," he marveled. "Well, boy, what ye goin' to do with us?"

He took a seat at the vacant wave of the man facing him.

"CAPTAIN! Why are you doing it?"

"Doin' it? Sailin' around the middle o' the Pacific in the old boat? Why, can you see a dead man sailin' a dead ship into Boston Port—with a dead woman knittin' in the cabin an' a dead cook rattlin' pans in the galley?"

He seemed to perceive a grim humor in the picture. The square beard was agitated for a moment by a silent convulsion of the hidden chest, and he turned a whimsical eye toward the quiet woman. Dunton took him up impatiently.

"No, no. I want to know why you did it—whatever you did. Don't I know well enough you're a dead man? I talked with one of your officers the P. M. boat brought back. By him and by Lloyds, you're rotting somewhere in the mouth of Beagle Channel these twelve years. If you were not you would have brought back your owner's ship—being a good officer."

At that "owner's ship" I thought Hanum started. At any rate he shot a look at the woman, whose eyes, however, never left the blue-gray yarn in her lap.

"When I was in the Brain Line," Dunton went on, "we used to look up to you as the type of the straight, clean officer. And I can't see why——"

"Boy, listen to me."

The man's heavy mirth had vanished; he leaned forward and spread out his hands.

"Boy, have you ever stood on the deck of a fine big ship of a moonlight night and looked up and up and up through the riggin' of her and listened to the talk of the wind around her canvas—the song of power, boy—clean, everlastin' power, straight from the hand of God? You have; I know you have. And yet you ask me why!

"Listen to me, boy; and, girl, you listen too, because you'll hear somethin' tonight that's goin' to shake your ideas of me. The day we cleared from Boston that last voyage, just before we had the anchor up, a boy come out an' handed me a note. It was from Mr. Brain, the owner. That note was an order to tie up at the Brandwell Dock in San Francisco at the other end. That was all, on the face of it.

"But don't you think I knew what it meant? Hadn't I seen the three sisters of the *Priscilla*, one after another, tie up at that same dock—sweet ships, clean an' sweet an' sta'nch—an' come away from

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it the ugly, stumpy hulks you see every day draggin' coastwise at the end of a tugboat's line? Barges—coal barges they'd cut 'em down to. Profit's gone out o' the wind, they say. I s'pose it's so. All right.

"We were laden with pine lumber for Valparaiso, carryin' one passenger—this lady. I'm afraid I wa'n't very good shipmates for the first few days. I took the ship out o' Boston Harbor in the wildest mood I've ever known on me.

"Yes, I was wild. I swore at God in heaven, because even the hand o' God seemed set against my ship—I call it my ship because she was more really mine than she ever could be her owner's. I took 'er around the Horn when you youngsters was in public school, an' my wife—my *first* wife, that is—made her weddin' trip in that cabin. And now the wind seemed to be always fair, hurryin' us on to the end. After we passed the Line I never had to touch the sails for weeks."

"We put into the River Plata for stores, an' when we came away I said good-by to the old river. I'd decided to give up the sea and ships. I used to relieve the helmsman now and then, after we left the river, of a night watch—you remember, girl, how you used to wonder to see the master steering with his own hands. And now I tell you why it was. It was because I wanted to feel her heart beating. It was just as if I was shakin' her hand good-by when her quarter come up on a swell an' that wheel lurched an' quivered."

IT WAS a strange thing to hear the square, stolid man going on, sitting far forward on the edge of one of the Captain's upholstered chairs, his little eyes staring straight ahead and his hands writhing together. And he a New Englander, son of austerity! He got to his feet abruptly and padded across the rug to a porthole.

"What quarter's she layin' on?" he queried.

"You can't make her out anyway," Dunton said. "It's too thick."

"Yes. But somehow I'd like to know."

It seemed to me I was imagining when I made something significant out of the look he shot at the woman and the look she returned. Dunton stepped to the speaking-tube. He spoke his question into the small brass mouth, and a thin, metallic rattle came down in answer.

"She lies dead on the port beam," he announced, turning to Hanum.

"Mmm," muttered the other, peering out through the blank pane. ". . . So we come down to the Horn for a record, an' I never wanted a record less in my life."

He sat down again.

"It was a different story when we got *there*. I've been around as many times as most men these days, but I never saw her as bad as she was that voyage. I'd hardly got my bearin's off Staten Island Light an' headed through Le Maire when it come on sou'west like it can do nowhere else in the world, an' there not often. Well, for twenty-two days we went blind, buckin' a thunderin' big gale and the queerest black sea I ever saw in my days, monstrous high an' heavy, but without so much as a fleck o' white. It was twenty-two days of torment—Prim there will tell you."

The woman raised her imperturbable eyes.

"It was very bad."

The intonation, more than the words, came direct from the inner sanctuary of the Province of Massachusetts.

"As I figure it now," the man went on, "in those twenty-two days we made about a hundred and eighty miles, and yet with all that batterin' we managed to keep every stick standin'. You know the devil that sort o' business plays with a crew.

"It was durin' those three weeks I begun to be two different men. You'd think pretty bad of a master that didn't care—or rather *wished* his ship would go to the bottom, wouldn't you? An' yet, it wa'n't the master in me wished that. The master was never more hard workin' and alert; I was on deck at all hours, wet to the skin an' half frozen an' keepin' the men to it almost with blows some weary times. But do what I could, there was somethin' inside o' me that kept wishin' an' hopin' the old ship *would* founder.

"In the end it was the sailin' instructions done for us. We wore out the gale, without losin' a man or a stick, an' the weather moderated surprisin' fast. The master was a proud man—an' yet some voice inside me kept sayin', 'No, you can't kill 'er in her beauty; they've got to maim 'er before she dies."

"We'd come through the gale, but I

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hadn't a notion of where we was; no sights for three weeks an' dead reckonin' worse than nothin'. I found out afterwards we was too close in to the Fuegan shore. The sailin' instructions on the Brain ships, you'll recall, make a point to have the boats outswung an' provisioned, when possible, in the Horn waters.

"So as soon as it moderated a bit I had all hands up to swing the boats out. They were a forsaken - lookin' crowd, just ready to drop an' not another fight left in 'em. I was just sayin' to myself how glad I was the gale had eased when it did, when I felt somethin' I'd never felt before in my years o' commandin' a ship—the bottom."

HANUM got up once more and went to the port, where he stood peering out and talking over his shoulder. The woman looked at him with the same placid gaze, and I thought he shook his head, almost imperceptibly, at her.

"Three minutes after she struck I was all alone on the deck. That crew was just as sure crazy as any men you could pick from a madhouse. I fought 'em the best one man can fight. I laid one big Norwegian out flat on his back with an iron bar, an' the next minute he was up again, never lookin' at me, never knowin' I was there, fightin' his way into one of the boats. They'd come to the end, that's all they was to it.

"It was all over so quick I was kind o' dazed. I stood on deck an' watched the boats reelin' out o' sight, an' the commander in me cursed the cowards, an' the rest o' me praised God.

"'Father in Heaven,' says I, 'you done better by the old girl 'n I believed you would.'

"Then I heard a woman's voice behind me. I thought I was dreamin' till I turned an' seen Prim's head in the companion.

"'In Heaven's name,' says I, 'what are you doin' here, woman?'

" 'This is no time for a Christian to blaspheme,' says she. She was crochetin' on a scarf. 'Anyhow,' says she, 'I don't believe there's much danger. It feels like sand.' I laughed in her face.

" 'Sand!' I jeered. 'In these waters?'

"But it was sand. If I hadn't been so laid out I'd have noticed myself how easy we was lyin'. It was comin' on dark an' I told 'er to go below while I watched. They wa'n't much to watch. The sea'd gone down till they was a gentle swell runnin', an' when the vessel floated, a trifle after midnight, I hardly felt the difference.

"About three in the mornin' I wandered for'rd to have a look around, an' in the fo'c's'le I found what I took for a dead man. It was old Sam, the negro cook, that'd sailed with the *Priscilla* longer'n I had. His head was bleedin' in three places where those crazy seamen had struck him with pins—you see he'd been tryin' to ease down the stampede. I couldn't find a sign o' life about him. But Prim could. Gentlemen, you ain't an idea o' what that woman can do with her hands an' her head."

Captain Hanum glanced at his watch, peered once more through the blank pane, and returned to his chair, mopping his brow with a sleeve of his jacket. He resumed his narrative.

"We sailed for five weeks, the three of us, on the self-same tack we floated off that bar. We couldn't do any otherwise, bein' in the hands o' God, so to speak. I kept her to the north'rd as much 's I could, with the wind northeasterly an' never varyin' a point all that time. I figgered to fetch up somewheres in the Marquesas, where there's French agents that could put me in the way of a crew.

"They wa'n't much to do them weeks but stand the wheel, an' Prim took her watch reg'lar, for all I could say, turn an' turn about with me an' Sam. The rest o' the time she an' I played cribbage. I guess we talked about everything in the world but ourselves. I didn't ask 'er any questions, bein's I wa'n't hankerin' to answer any about myself.

"WELL, we never made the Marquesas. Instead, we come past to the south'rd an' fetched up at one o' the Tuamotus, but that was just as good. I'll never forget the look o' that bay, after the anchor was down an' Prim an' I was standin' on the quarter-deck lookin' off toward shore.

"The sun was just down. The water lay away, smooth like soft glass, to the yellow beach, and up behind stood a line o' palm-trees and under 'em a half-dozen or so of tin houses. They was some figgers runnin' along the beach pointin' at us. Here we was safe, and here was the *Priscilla* safe, an' a

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miracle it was. Prim turned an' looked up at me sayin'—

"'You're a proud man, aren't you?'

"'No, I ain't,' says I.

"She never asked me why I said the words I did—guessing perhaps that I couldn't 've explained 'em.

"We lay there in that bay for eight months. The French agent lived in one o' the tin houses, and his assistant had lived in another, only he'd died of fever about ten days before we come in. The agent was pretty far gone himself, an' when he wa'n't in a spell he was drinkin' hard an' steady, so he wa'n't much use to us. The Government boat was expected in three months. We waited three months, then four, then five, an' it never come because it was at the bottom of the Balintang Channel all the time. Of course we didn't know anything about that.

"I could've shipped some o' the natives an' worked a way to one o' the Marquesas, only the agent was gettin' lower an' lower an' harder an' harder to get on with, an' he said I couldn't go till the boat come—some technicality or other. Our stores was beginnin' to run low.

"One evenin' Prim an' I was standin' on deck. Sam was below. I'd been thinkin' pretty hard the past week.

" 'Prim,' says I, 'you've been as patient as ever was a saint, an' you haven't said a word, Prim, but you're hankerin' to get home. Oh, I know it,' says I.

" 'I guess I can stand it if you can,' Prim answers.

" 'Well, I can't stand it to do *nothin'*,' says I. 'Now I'm goin' ashore tomorrow,' says I, 'an' get some stores out o' them tin houses, French agent 'r no French agent, and I'm goin' to ship some o' them brown beggars, with a gun if I have to, an' I'm goin' to lay a course straight for Honolulu, an',' says I, 'get it over with.'

" 'Get what over with?' she kind o' half said, an' then she dropped it an' looked to sea. I seen she'd dropped it an' left it at that.

"An' that same night the French agent set his papers afire an' blew out his drunken life with a revolver.

"Three days after that we sailed out o' the harbor an' I laid a course for Honolulu, with a crew o' heathen for'rd that didn't know a halyard from a keelson. I figgered on a hard voyage for myself. Well, I was standin' up an' kind o' sayin' good-by inside o' me to the island, when old Sam come aft an' stopped alongside o' me.

" 'Excuse me, sir,' says he, sort o' coughin', 'but wa'n't it the Hand o' the Almighty made that there agent burn his papers before he killed hisself?'

" 'How's that, Sam?' says I.

" 'Why,' says he, 'it makes you a free man, an' this ship a free ship. There ain't a soul in the world now but us that knows we ain't layin' off the Horn this minute. Cap'n,' says he, shufflin' his feet, 'I been sailin' in this ship longer'n you have, an' it'd hurt me 's much as it would you to see 'er at the end of a towboat's line.'

" 'What d'you know about it?' says I.

" 'Excuse me, sir,' says he, 'but the foc's'le knows about them things a sight quicker'n the cabin does.'

"I give you my word, gentlemen, the idea of such a thing had never come into my head. I was taken off my feet. I sent Sam back to the galley pretty sharp, an' tried to put his words out o' my mind.

"I couldn't do it. They stuck with me through the weeks that followed. In the quiet of the night watches I used to argue the thing out with the ship, settin' my honor over against her beauty. Honestly, it seemed as if she understood what I was sayin' an' bowed her head with a kind of a sigh with the heavin' o' the rollers. Daytimes I used to talk with Prim about how astonished folks would be when I come back safe an' sound with my ship—always *my* ship. Prim never showed a sign, so I knew she didn't understand that the vessel wa'n't really mine by law.

"WHEN the voyage was about a month old they come a change o' weather, with a big gale for sixteen days. How we ever come through that I can't tell you, with a set o' wild an' stampedin' critters for'rd to do with. In the main it was Prim held things together. After the gale, which blew us all out o' our reckonin', they was head-winds for four or five weeks, then another gale, an' we fetched up in one o' the Manahiki Islands. It's an out-of-the-way place, with a few ramshackle huts on it. Most o' the folks there was beach-combers—men that wa'n't wanted anywhere else in the world. Right there I took the first step, lyin' to myself all the time an' lettin' on that I didn't want folks

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like *that* tellin' the news about me an' the *Priscilla*. I took a bucket o' paint an' sloshed out the name on the stern an' bows, an' Prim held the bucket.

"A schooner come into that port. It had a shady look about it 's far 's you could see it away. The master come alongside of us in a dingey. When he see the fresh paint over the bow he looked wise an' contented.

" 'Got a commission?' he sung out.

"Prim was standin' near me. I looked at her, an' never a sign was on her face.

" 'No,' I sung back, 'I ain't. Come aboard.'

Then I turned to Prim. Says I:

" 'Prim,' says I, 'bein's we're here now, we might 's well turn a bit of money before we go home. This here won't take long probably, an' after that we'll lay a course for port.'

"She looked at me steady a minute.

" 'Perry,' says she, 'you ain't ever goin' home. This life's got into you. An',' says she, 'it's got into me too.'

"Well, I was so took aback that I couldn't do nothin' but fiddle with a splinter on the rail, while the schooner's master was climbin' the ladder. When he come on deck he looked around him an' seemed amused.

" 'You ain't goin' to be busy for a couple o' months, are ye?' says he, grinnin'.

" 'What ye smirkin' about?' says I kind o' fierce. 'Ain't it *my* ship?' says I, 's much to Prim as to him, if I tell the truth. Then he grinned wider'n ever, an' I give him a cut under the chin an' knocked him over the side. Then I helped fish him out, give him a drink, an' went ashore with him to the only house in the place.

"Says he: 'I want you to go to a certain island in the Gilberts—'givin' me the bearin's—'lay off an' on till night, show two green lights and take aboard a cargo of general merchandise that'll come out to you in small boats. Then lay a course for latitude such-and-such, longitude such-and-such, an' stand off an' on there till I pick you up—an' say nothin'. I pay you four hundred pounds in English money.'

" 'I'll do it,' says I.

"THAT evenin', on deck, Prim an' me was married by a beachcomber who swore he use' to be a Presbyterian minister. They's no way o' tellin'——"

There had been a subtle difference between the tone of this last utterance and what had gone before. The heavy seaman broke off and looked uncertainly at the immobile face of the woman. One could imagine a long vista of years, shadowed a little for this middle-aged pair of New Englanders by that same, "They's no way o' tellin'."

The woman raised her eyes and spoke with a steady, ponderable authority.

"While he was marryin' us, Perry, he was a minister of the Lord."

That was all. That was enough. Hanum took up the thread of his narrative with fresh resolution.

"I've give you the directions for that first commission," he said, "because it was a sample of every voyage we've made in the last ten years. Go to a certain place, ship certain merchandise, go to a certain place, unship. Two months ago I met a Jap in the Marshall Islands. Says he: 'They's a little island in one seventy-one west, twenty-four thirty-one eleven north. You'll find there three men an' a certain amount o' general merchandise. Go an' get it an' bring it to a certain place'—o' course I can't tell *you* the place. There's the island out there, an' here we are.

"Well, that about finishes the story. I reckon we know the South Pacific; eh, Prim? I guess they ain't practically a spit o' sand in what you'd call the South Seas that we ain't touched at, Prim an' me an' Sam an' the old ship. We've had gales an' we've had mutinies an' we've had fever. We've gone twelve years without seein' the face of a respectable white man till this night. But the ship's a ship—an' she will be a ship till she dies."

The last was in a new tone for the man—a big-chested heat and security that went strangely with the uncertain wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. He took out his watch and glanced toward the porthole again, an action so often repeated that night that I wondered at it. His next words were addressed to the woman.

"Prim," he said, standing up squarely on his feet, "Prim, you know somethin' about me now that you ain't known or asked in these twelve years."

For the third time that night, the woman looked up from her knitting and spoke. When she finished, the world seemed to me of a sudden immeasurably larger.

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"Perry Hanum," she pronounced in her even accents, "you haven't told me anything tonight that I haven't known for twelve years. You never spoke, so I never spoke. But if you'd read the other note from Daniel Brain that day—you didn't even know there was another note—you'd have understood why I happened to be your passenger. The ship out there was named for part of my mother's name—Prim Danger. Daniel Brain is my uncle."

Hanum did not stir from his erect rigidity. The woman sat looking up at him. Dunton's head rested in the palms of his hands. For him, of all, this moment was hardest.

AFTER a time I began to wonder what had happened to the porthole upon which my eyes happened to have fixed. Before, it had been a gray blank on the wall. Now, by some subtle alchemy, its color had changed to a sumptuous and glowing red. It was an appreciable passage of time before my brain could come at the significance of this change. Then a bell was clanging over Dunton's head. A hysterical rattle shook the speaking-tube on the wall. Action succeeded inaction. As I plunged through the doorway to the companion, I caught a fragmentary glimpse of the quiet woman pointing toward the fiery disk, and the heavy sentimentalist following the gesture with his eyes.

Above decks, all the atmosphere of the world seemed to have changed to moist flame, a silent and ardent turmoil, filling all the visible sphere. On the starboard hand it waned a little; on the port hand it drained into a radiant core of fire. Already a gentle heat flowed over us from the direction of that core. Here and there dark objects progressed toward us through the red fog, like gigantic spiders of limbo walking across the water. From one of these boats came the shout of our third officer, Gabriel.

"Can't do a thing," he was calling, "she's afire in seven places and going like powder."

Invisible, along the cutter's waterline, they poured up to us, a subdued riot of island tongues. I stood beside the rail as they came over—small, glistening brown men, nearly naked—gradually filling the whole space of the after deck. One among them was not brown, however, but black, with straggling tufts of gray wool on a shining dome of head. He seemed very old, but there was something triumphant about his halting progress. I would have sworn that a faint stench of kerosene emanated from his ragged garments.

After a little I went forward and climbed to the bridge. Dunton was there. He pointed down toward the rail on the port side, forward. A middle-aged couple were standing by it—the woman looking out toward the waning fire, the man watching the woman's face and wondering at her. Dunton turned to me.

"Arndt," he said, "he would wonder more, and so would she, if they knew something that I know. I didn't speak of it down there—they'll find out some time. It is this: The woman said she was Daniel Brain's niece. She might have said that she was the only living relation that Daniel Brain had. And Daniel Brain died two months after the *Priscilla Danger* sailed out of Boston harbor that last time—died intestate."

"Which means——" I wondered.

"Which means that when the *Priscilla Danger* touched on that bar at the mouth of Beagle Channel, her owner was crocheting a scarf in the cabin of her."

FAR out on the blue-black floor of the mid-Pacific, a tiny spark glowed, waned, fluttered and died, leaving the night once more unmarred. A full-rigged ship, name given as the *Southern Cross*, cargo given as general merchandise, had burned to the water's edge, cause of fire unknown. And even now the second officer of the *Cosimo* perspired in the heavy air of the chartroom, putting these things into the official language of the "rough log."

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Flower of Battle

by Joseph Mills Hanson

Author of "The Clerk from the Vicksburg Packet," "The Conquest of the Missouri," "With Sully into the Sioux Land," "Frontier Ballads," etc.

"ONE hour here, men, to feed and water your horses and eat supper. If any of you want to eat at the stage-house and save your rations, all right. But don't straggle. It's to be a night forced march, remember, from here to Prairie Dog Fork; and assembly will sound at seven o'clock sharp. Dismiss the troop, sergeant."

Captain Murdock snapped his watch shut, glanced at his orderly trumpeter to be sure that the latter understood the time for blowing assembly, and then, without waiting to see his acting first sergeant move to the front and with sharp precision dismiss the troop, he turned and accompanied by his young second lieutenant rode away toward the stage-house, standing a hundred yards out on the prairie from the edge of a little wooded ravine.

The sun was still well above the western horizon; for it was not long after midsummer, and the air was hot and dry. Since before noon Troop B had been swinging steadily and swiftly down the dusty, interminable gray streak of the emigrant road from Fort Forsyth, now thirty miles behind.

It had been a weary, thirsty march, but nearly every man in the troop was at least a two-year veteran, and they as well as their horses were thoroughly inured to the hardships of frontier campaigning. They were not at all exhausted by what they had been through, though as they unsaddled, picketed and grained their horses there was some good-natured grumbling over the night forced march ahead.

"Prairie Dog Fork tonight! Lord Harry, it's twenty-five miles!"

"Yes, an' what good'll it do when we get there? Lie an' sizzle in the brush all day an' then ride back to the fort again."

"Well, begorra, it's Throop B thot's done it a dozen toimes befure, an' phy not ag'in? It's good ixercise to kape you young divils out o' mischief."

"And you out of the guard-house, Mike. Why ain't you ever sober except on the trail?"

"By Saint Peter, ye young upsthart, bekase there ain't nothin' in loife worth kapin' sober fur excipt whin we're afther the ridskins."

"Huh! Tell that to Sergeant Colton, Mike, and hear him call ye a liar. I'll bet he'd fifty times over ruther bivouac here at Perry's stage-house tonight than push on to the Prairie Dog. Look at him, streakin' out for the stage-house! He'll save his rations tonight, you bet."

"Ah, well, ye shpalpeen, me an' Frank Colton is two different things. Toime was whin Oi kept sober, too, loike Tommy Moore says,

> 'Whin love was new an' hope was broight,
> Ere Oi could doubt or thou desayve.' "

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"Git out with yer poetry, Mike Maloney. What do you know about love?"

"A —— sight more than *you* iver will, ye young ruffian. Untangle yer bald-faced, spavined nag outen moy picket-rope. Moy hoorse wants some grass forninst we saddle up ag'in."

Frank Colton, acting first sergeant in the absence of his senior, who was in hospital at the fort nursing a bullet-wound caught in an Indian foray, after caring for his own horse and seeing, more hastily than usual, that the other men did likewise, had walked quickly to the stage-house where he shook hands familiarly with the middle-aged, one-armed proprietor, Tom Perry, and then stepped into the large room which did duty as an office in the daytime, as guests' sleeping quarters at night, and as dining-room at meal hours.

For the present it was serving the latter purpose, and at a long table down its center a half-dozen soldiers, three or four "bull-whackers," or freight-team drivers, and as many more frontier characters whose occupation was not apparent from their dress, were already seated, ravenously devouring the evening meal.

Sergeant Colton slipped into a chair among them, after bidding good evening to Mrs. Perry who was waiting on the table—a large woman, the comeliness of whose features was not altogether neutralized by the perspiration coursing down her cheeks nor the damp hair plastered against her forehead. She smiled and spoke to him with frank cordiality as he came in, then went on with her manifold duties, while the sergeant discussed his supper as if he were in a hurry to be through.

The low room was insufferably hot and stuffy. Flies buzzed everywhere, and the supping men talked little, Colton less than any. But as he ate he invariably glanced up when the door into the kitchen opened, looking down at his plate again when Mrs. Perry or her youngest daughter entered. Once or twice the soldiers noted his glance and winked at one another knowingly, but by the time he had finished his supper nearly every one else had left the table and sought the cooler air outside.

When Colton pushed back his chair and rose also, Mrs. Perry and her little girl were clearing away the dishes.

"Is Nancy in the kitchen, Mrs. Perry?" he asked.

"Yes, she is, Frank. But hot and rumpled enough, poor child. We've had so much to do today; and now, to cap the climax, Troop B dropping in this evening."

"Well, I'm hot and rumpled too, Mrs. Perry, so I guess she won't mind. May I go out?"

"Surely. Go right on."

He opened the door and stepped into the smoky, stewing kitchen. A tall girl, bending over a table heaped with dirty dishes, straightened up as he entered, flushed with annoyed surprise and hastily brushed the dark hair back from her temples.

"Frank Colton!" she cried. "How dare you catch me this way, without a minute's warning so I could make myself presentable?"

"Why, you knew I was here, Nancy, with the troop," he returned, rather taken aback. "You didn't suppose I wasn't going to see you?"

"Oh, no, indeed, I didn't suppose that," she replied with a rippling little laugh which bespoke confidence. "But you might have let mother tell me before you came in."

"Nancy, you never looked prettier in your life," declared Colton in boyish sincerity. "But see me—all dirt from head to foot."

The girl bestowed a glance, in which admiration was but slightly concealed, upon the six feet of straight, wiry manhood before her in its close-fitting blue uniform and cavalry boots.

"You're as spick and span," said she, judicially, "as a sergeant of the guard at Fort Leavenworth, except for a little dust."

"Well, if you think that, the way I look now," he replied, coming around the table to her side, "there's hope for me if I should really spruce up a bit. Nancy, it's seemed two years instead of two weeks since I came through here last with the mail escort."

"It does seem a long Summer, doesn't it?" she answered, moving away to the stove. "So dreadfully hot and dry."

Mrs. Perry pushed open the door with a portentous clatter of dishes and came in.

"Nancy," said she, "won't you please go down to the spring-house and bring up a pitcher of milk? I want to make raised muffins for breakfast. This freight outfit is going to camp here overnight."

Nancy stepped to the cupboard and took down a pitcher. As she walked to the outer door Colton followed her.

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"I'll help you carry it back," said he.

She turned upon him a roguish glance.

"I don't think it will be too heavy for me to carry alone; but, of course, if you wish——"

THEY stepped out and took the descending path toward the brushy ravine. The sun was now set, and a zephyr of cool air was stirring down across the prairie from the northwest.

The girl threw back her head and, straightening her shoulders, drew in deep breaths of the refreshing air. The young soldier walking at her side fell back slightly to give her the narrow path, and as she, with light, quick steps, led the way, he watched with admiring eyes the curve of her cheek and chin which he could see from his position.

"Nancy," said he after a moment, "why are you in such a hurry? You know I have only a few minutes here."

"Why, I'm not in a hurry," she replied, slowing her pace; "though perhaps mother is, for the milk."

"She will hardly mind a few minutes more or less," Colton returned. Then suddenly he added: "Nancy, haven't you anything more kind to say to me today than you had last time I saw you?"

They had reached the little building at the bottom of the ravine, called by courtesy a "spring-house," though in reality it was merely an enclosed shed, somewhat sheltered from the Summer heat by the sparse foliage of overhanging willows, and with water accessible from the sluggish creek beside it. The girl took the pitcher from him, set it down on the shelf beside the milk-pans and looked at him with a tantalizing smile.

"If you mean," she said, "am I going to tell you 'yes' now—then I have nothing more kind to say."

Colton swung around and, snapping a dry twig from a willow branch beside him, began breaking it rapidly into bits.

"Nancy Perry, how long are you going to keep me hanging between heaven and—the other place?" he demanded.

Her voice was doubtful.

"Until—well, until I can say I am sure of myself. You wouldn't want me to 'let you drop,' as you put it, until I can say that, would you?"

"No. I'd rather hang," he admitted, with a wry smile, tossing away the twig and leaning his arm against the door casing. Then he went on in a low, serious tone:

"Nancy, I know I haven't much to offer you except a faithful heart. But that little claim I have marked down in Colorado is the prettiest claim in the foothills of the Rockies, and I can take it up in a year from now, when my enlistment is out.

"And I've saved money enough from my pay and allowances to build a pretty little house and stock the place for business. The little house will never be built, though, Nancy, if you don't say 'yes.' "

The girl, her hands clasped in front of her, listened with downcast eyes, while a softly heightened color came into her cheeks. Perhaps the vision of the little house among the foothills of the Rockies was rather attractive, but she said nothing. Colton, however, was not a good mind-reader. To him her silence seemed ominous, and he asked quickly—

"Nancy, have you heard from Jerry Orchard again?"

She inclined her head affirmatively and Colton bit his lip.

"Has he gotten that fifty thousand dollars yet?" he pursued.

"Very nearly," she replied.

Colton considered.

"If you care more for Orchard than you do for me, Nancy," he said at length with an evident effort, "I ought not object, however badly it hurts. And it isn't my habit to speak ill of a man, even a rival or an enemy. But, Nancy, I want you to be happy; and I don't believe Jerry Orchard can make you so.

"I know he's a great business man, and he'll make lots more than fifty thousand dollars out of Texas cattle before he's through. But he's unscrupulous, cold-blooded. I know, though perhaps you don't, that he broke more than one poor soldier lad—broke him heart and soul—in the gambling dives when he was in the service; that's where he started his fortunes.

"And you yourself know that he served his sentence in Leavenworth for desertion from the army—desertion on the eve of battle."

Nancy's glance wavered.

"I never did hear, though," she said defensively, "but that there might have been good reasons. He says there were; the best in the world."

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Colton's eyes flashed.

"Isn't that lame reasoning, Nancy, for the daughter of Tom Perry, who lost his arm fighting over the guns at Champion Hills? However—" he turned away dejectedly—"it's for you to decide whether such reasoning satisfies you. Jerry Orchard boasted he was coming back to get you when he had fifty thousand dollars. Well, I'd have to wait a long time before I could make that experiment.

"But tonight I'm going where Jerry Orchard wouldn't go—on a march that perhaps I'll never come back from. But whether I come back or whether I lie out on the prairie, Nancy, it will be honorably."

The girl winced perceptibly but recovered herself at once, though not so completely as to deter her from laying on Colton's arm a hand that trembled a little.

"Don't talk so, Frank; you won't be hurt," she replied, trying to speak lightly. "Why, you have been out on half a dozen scouts this Summer and never heard so much as a shot from the hostiles."

"There always comes a time, though," he answered, his gray eyes fixed earnestly, hungrily, upon her face. "Of course it will hardly be this time. But, anyway, whatever happens, Nancy, just remember this: that if Frank Colton had little to put up against fifty thousand dollars except honor and a true heart, at least he held that honor precious and not a thing to be thrown away, and he kept in that heart no picture but yours."

He looked at his watch.

"Assembly will sound in just a minute. I must run, Nancy. Good-by."

"Say 'good night,' Frank, instead," she corrected softly.

"Good night, little girl," he replied obediently.

He raised to his lips the hand she extended to him, then turned and dashed up the path to the prairie.

She watched him with a sober face until he disappeared, then suddenly her eyes grew moist.

"He needn't have been so solemn at the last minute," she said to herself half aloud, as she raised a milk-pan and carefully tilted its rim over the pitcher. "Men are so stupid sometimes."

Colton ran breathlessly up before Troop B just as the brazen notes of the bugle rang out and Captain Murdock, observing him, raised his hand and twisted an end of his sandy mustache to conceal the half smile caused by the sergeant's precipitate appearance.

But the Captain was no cynic and his smile was to himself only. Five minutes later the troop, with jingling accouterments and dull trample of hoofs, was marching away in the falling dusk northward across the boundless, trackless prairie.

The acting first sergeant, riding beside the shadowy column, kept his face to the front, watching the heat-lightning that played low along the northern horizon. But once, just as they passed over a slight rise and started down the opposite side, he turned in his saddle and, with one gauntleted hand on the cantle, looked back to where far away a light twinkled faintly through the window of Perry's stage-house.

AT DAWN the command, with the exception of three civilian scouts who had vanished in the vastnesses ahead, lay concealed in the narrow valley and among the sparse, stunted timber of Prairie Dog Fork. At half past eight, when already the unclouded sun was turning the pulseless air in the valley to furnace-like heat, the scouts returned. The Captain and the lieutenant conferred with them on the edge of the prairie, looking off northward, while the men below with vain impatience tried to catch the purport of their talk. Presently the officers turned abruptly and came down.

"Attention!" ordered Captain Murdock crisply. "Prepare to mount; mount. Fours right, column left; march."

They scrambled up out of the valley and pushed forward again across the plains. The Captain motioned Sergeant Colton to his side.

"The scouts have been seven miles ahead, sergeant," said he. "They report no enemy in sight, but about five miles from here a heavy trail one day old bearing to the northwest. War-party; no lodges. It's probably the one that crossed the emigrant road day before yesterday; the one we're after. We'll take the trail and try to catch them up this side Rattlesnake Hills. Keep your eyes open, sergeant. We're coming into dangerous country."

"Yes, sir. How about water, sir?"

"None till we reach Plume Creek, the scouts say; twenty-three miles. Don't let

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the men empty their canteens too quickly. As for the horses, we'll ride easy. It's too sizzling hot for fast marching."

"Yes, sir," said Colton again, and dropped back to his place.

The column plodded on, the men, though at "route order," for the most part silent. The sun beat down, the horses sweated, the parched grass and occasional wilted prairie flowers beside the way looked as if they were dying.

Presently the Indian trail discovered by the scouts was reached and the column turned northwest, following it, while the scouts rode far out in advance, cautiously inspecting the country ahead from each low rise of ground they came to. One, two, three hours passed. A half-mile off to the right appeared what seemed a long depression in the prairie, which the Captain studied for some time as he rode along. When one of the scouts came back with an unimportant report, the commander pointed to the depression and asked:

"What's that?"

The man followed his glance and answered:

"Starved-to-Death Creek. If the trail holds, we'll cross it in a couple of miles. Bone dry, though, at this season."

Presently some low hills were reached, one rolling ridge after another, breaking down toward the dry creek. The column had crossed several of them and was in one of the little valleys between when across the top of the hill next ahead suddenly came tearing the three scouts, furiously urging their horses and yelling:

"Injuns! Injuns!"

At the same instant, far off to the right, burst out a hideous uproar of whoops; and the startled soldiers saw a swarm of mounted Indians pouring up toward them from the hidden gorge of Starved-to-Death Creek. Captain Murdock's revolver flashed out and his sandy mustache seemed fairly to bristle.

"Attention!" he shouted. "Left front into line; march. Advance carbine. Trot, march. Gallop, march. Get to the hill, men! We can hold them easily there."

The line raced up the slope, gaining the top none too soon. A mass of Indians, perhaps one hundred and fifty in number, was already half-way up on the other side. A withering volley from the cavalry carbines smote them in the face and sent them scampering back across the valley to the next hill beyond.

But the scattering fire they had delivered in return had sent two troopers reeling from their saddles and dropped a horse, which lay kicking feebly on the hilltop. A moment later one platoon of Troop B, faced to the right, repulsed the rush of the even stronger party of assailants from the creek. But again the vanquished took toll. One more soldier and two more horses lay helpless on the hill.

The troopers dismounted, threw themselves easily on the ground and beneath the slouched rims of their campaign hats calmly watched the Indians, after their habit, extend their flanks beyond carbine range until the hill was surrounded. These dispositions completed, presently from all sides they rushed forward again; forward and back, forward and back, but never very close to the muzzles of the deadly carbines, pouring spiteful volleys into their whirling ranks.

Now and then a pony or a warrior toppled over; but also now and then a soldier uttered a grunt or a cry and dropped his carbine, or a horse reared, screamed and crashed to the ground.

THE sun beat down mercilessly; the men, handing to the busy surgeon their already more than half empty canteens for the wounded comrades who were moaning for water, sprawled in a circle on the baked ground and tried to imagine moisture on their parching tongues.

The Captain, lying on his side twisting his mustache, consulted with the scouts. At length he went and talked to his Lieutenant, then came down and knelt beside Sergeant Colton where he lay behind his platoon on the least exposed side of the hill, before the horses.

"Sergeant," said he, "the scouts say the bed of Starved-to-Death Creek turns westward in the swale just beyond that next hill, in front. If we can get on that hill we can probably send a detachment down to the creek and dig for water. It's there—two or three feet under ground, perhaps; but we must have it, especially for the wounded. I am going to charge that hill."

Colton's teeth flashed in a smile.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I've been thinking of that, sir. It'll be fine, too, to crumple that infernal line of redskins over there."

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The Captain returned his smile, though thoughtfully. He thoroughly approved of his acting first sergeant.

"When we move," he continued, "we'll have to do it quick, before the enemy gets our idea. We'll straighten out the horses first, so that the men can all mount at once. When the horses are moved, the Indians will rush us again. We'll repulse them and while they're going back, we will charge. Your second platoon, sergeant, will take the wounded and the dismounted men."

"Yes, sir," said Colton. "My platoon will be ready, sir."

The horse-holders, instructed, led or backed their animals into a rough semblance of formation in column of platoons, seeing which the enemy, suspicious of a coup, swept forward again in a yelping wave. Above the forked flashes of the carbines the Captain watched them with cool calculation, and as he saw the first signs of the inevitable break, he shouted:

"To horse! Mount. Return carbine. Careful, there, Olson! Lift Daugherty easy; he's hard hit. Steinmeyer, don't you see your horse is shot in the off hock? Mount double with Vernon. Finnigan, never let that ammunition-mule get away from you. Ready, Lieutenant Drummond? Ready, Colton? Raise pistol. To the charge; march. Trot, march. Gallop, march. Charge!"

A living tornado, the forty-odd horses and fifty men of Troop B thundered down upon the startled Indians before them. The latter stood not a moment, but fled like rabbits.

But the foes who had been attacking from the other side, being now in the rear, swept forward again in hot pursuit over the abandoned hill, where remained only a half-dozen dead or wounded cavalry-horses. Their wild shots sang like bees over the heads of the troop, which paid no heed but swooped on across the valley and up the slope of the hill in front. They reached the crest; the dry creek lay below.

The Captain halted them, his eyes dancing.

"Well done, men! Dismount. Sergeant, give those fellows in the rear a volley." Suddenly his face went pallid. "Good God! The reserve ammunition!"

Two hundred feet down the slope behind them the ammunition-mule lay kicking, the two cases of cartridges still strapped to his pack-saddle. On the ground beside him reposed Finnigan very quietly, face downward.

Every one realized what it meant. Hardly a man had twenty rounds of carbine ammunition left in his belt. In the two cases on the pack-saddle down there were two thousand "50 - 70 - 450" cartridges — forty rounds for every man in Troop B. It was the entire reserve supply. Its loss meant annihilation.

"Men," began Captain Murdock, "there is our ammunition; there is Finnigan. Will any one volunteer——"

"I will, Captain. Keep their fire down if you can, sir," and Sergeant Colton, laying his carbine on the ground, ran swiftly down the slope.

But the Indians did not intend easily to lose the precious load of the fallen mule. The news of the crisis had flashed around their lines, even to the farther side of the hill; and from every quarter they dashed forward in a desperate charge. The hilltop blazed and crackled with the fire of the hard-pressed cavalry.

Still Colton sped on like a well-trained foot-racer, while the enemy strove to muster courage in face of the withering carbine fire to ride in on him. His comrades on the hillside nearest him, furiously pumping lead at his assailants, wriggled slightly forward down the slope as they saw him reach his goal, turn Finnigan over on his back and look intently into his face.

THEN he straightened, jerked out his revolver and shot point blank into the breast of a single dauntless warrior who was galloping down on him with lance in rest. The Indian pitched headlong to the ground.

Colton thrust the revolver back in his holster and, drawing out his knife, slashed the saddle and pack girths in two under the mule's belly. When the animal had gone down saddle and pack had turned, and they were not under him. The sergeant pulled the saddle up on the mule's side. Between shots the men on the hill watched him breathlessly.

"Phat's he tryin' to do? Merciful God, he ain't goin' to try an' carry 'em *both*—an' the saddle, too? He'll break his back. He's up! He's comin', or moy name's not Moike Maloney!

"Schwate Mary, Mother, sthand betwixt

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him an' the haythen now! Ah, pretty Nancy Perry, phat would ye say at this minute? Phat *will* ye say whin he comes back to ye no more? Sure, he can't come out o' this. But Hiven only lit him an' Oi'll bid a thousand beads."

Colton, bent far forward, came on slowly, slowly, staggering up the slope—the corners of the saddle gripped in his hands, the crushing weight of two hundred and fifty pounds of ammunition resting squarely on his back. Bullets zipped around him and chugged into the ground at his feet.

He was within fifteen yards of the lines and a half dozen men were already running forward to help him when he uttered a little gasp and sank forward on his hands, the saddle and cases slipping off his back to the ground. Eager hands seized him and the precious ammunition and carried both back to the flat crest of the hill where the wounded lay, ungrazed by the enemy's bullets.

"Finnigan is dead, sir, or I'd have brought him in first," said Colton sorrowfully, as the surgeon knelt and turning him on his side swiftly stripped back the clothing from his bullet-torn back and chest. "If only I could have saved him!"

"Ah, rest easy, Frank," returned the doctor tenderly. "We know you'd have brought him in, lad, if there had been any use. Now, grip your hands hard; I'm going after the bullet. There! Now we'll dress it and you'll feel better."

Colton lay with closed eyes while the surgeon worked. Presently there broke out a fresh hubbub of war-whoops, and the rifle-fire rattled crescendo. Colton asked—

"What's that?"

The surgeon looked around.

"A detachment's making a rush for the creek-bed. Lieutenant Drummond's leading. Ah, they've reached it! Thank Heaven we brought two spades for emergencies."

He continued his work, then shortly, placing a saddle under his patient's head, went away to other tasks as urgent.

Left alone, the sergeant lay still on his side, his eyes roving over the sprawled men and the patient, standing horses within his field of vision, and far out beyond, shimmering uncertainly in the heat haze, a segment of the enemy's heavy, restless circle.

No air was stirring. The rays of the early afternoon sun seemed to drill like hot needles through every fiber of clothing, drying up perspiration, oppressing the lungs, causing the blood to pound in the temples. The other wounded men a few feet behind him were moaning for water; but Colton compressed his lips and would not moan, though his mouth was like cotton, his head felt strangely and sharp pains were stabbing through his torn side.

A foot in front of his face grew a single short frond of goldenrod, not yet blossomed, but showing the gold through all its numberless tiny buds. It was odd that it had not yet been trampled in all the turmoil. Colton slowly stretched out his arm, laid his hand protectingly behind the small weed and, half aloud, began talking to it.

"Aren't you lost out here on this great prairie, little chap? It's a wonder you're still alive, with all these men and horses slashing around. You ought to be with your brothers and sisters, back in some fence corner in old Ohio or out along the edge of the pine woods in Colorado, where the breeze is cool—cool, and there's shade close by. Oh, such dark, cool shade!

"You need a dark background, you do; something soft and wavy. Ah, yes! How pretty you'd look in Nancy's hair! I can see you now, caught in the silky coil of it—there, just so. And beneath, her eyes smiling at me—sometimes they have smiled at me. What's that I read once?—

> " 'How brilliant is the morning star!
> The evening star, how tender;
> The light of both is in her eyes—
> Their softness and their splendor.'

"You'll never see her eyes or her hair, goldenrod, but, all the same, you belong with them. . . . Dear God, I wonder if there's water anywhere in this endless prairie? . . . Oh, Captain, is that you? How goes it, sir?"

Murdock crouched beside him and gripped his hand.

"We're holding out. How are you, Colton? I never saw a braver act. You'll get the Medal of Honor for this day's work, if I have anything to say about it."

"You're hurt, too, Captain!"

"It's nothing; just a flesh wound in the forearm. The men at the creek will get some water up here soon. I know you're burning up."

"Oh, yes. But give it to the other boys first. Please don't lean on that goldenrod, sir. Is Corporal Mullins badly hurt?"

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"Dying, I'm afraid. Well, old man, keep a stiff upper lip. We'll get out of this some way. I'll see you again soon."

A little way down the hill the Captain stopped beside the surgeon, busy binding up the wounded foot of a man who was, nevertheless, remaining in the firing-line.

"How about Colton, Doctor?"

The surgeon looked grave.

"He's in no immediate danger, sir. If he could be in hospital—even in an ambulance—within forty-eight hours, very likely he could be saved. But out here in the heat—fever, hemorrhage—you know. It's a mighty slim chance."

The Captain twisted his mustache, frowned and turned away. As he went the soldier next in line to him with the wounded foot turned his head, saluted, and said softly:

"Captain! Oh, Captain! May Oi shpake to ye, sor?"

Once more the Indians charged and carbines answered rifles like the clatter of a steam-riveter. But up on the hilltop Colton was talking again to the goldenrod, giving it now his confidences, while the thin, pungent powder smoke drifted over them.

"There's a spring comes out of the hillside just back of where I want to build the little house. There's cress growing in the pool, and a big cedar leans over it. Cool, oh, so cool!

"I can see Nancy walking down to the house from there, the sunset light on her face, smiling at me—yes, I can; with *you* in her dark hair and me, just in from the field, waiting for her, and——

"Why, hello, Flock. You here, too? I'm sorry. Where are you hit? In the chest? Funny, I don't see any blood. Let me see. Let me see, I say!"

The sergeant's hand went to his holster and jerked open the flap.

"Flock, you —— scoundrel, you're soldiering! Get back to the line, there, before I shoot your infernal head off! That's better. Don't come back here again."

The revolver returned to its holster.

"—and Nancy, coming down the path with the sunset light on her face——"

AT SUNSET, however, Captain Murdock lay with Private Maloney on the edge of the hill overlooking the narrow, winding depression of Starved-to-Death Creek. The soldier was looking through the officer's field-glasses across the boundless waste of prairies to the southeast, over which they had come in the morning. Said the Captain:

"Your best way, I think, Maloney, will be to work down along the creek-bed for a mile or so, till you're sure of being well past their lines. Then strike across the plains for Prairie Dog Fork. It's about fifteen miles from here. Here's my compass. Try to reach the Fork as near where we crossed it as you can, so as to keep your bearings.

"Do you see that dry slough away off there? No, to the right—yes. That's the direction. If you see any signs of Indians you'd better hide in the brush along the Fork tomorrow and ride for Perry's stage-house tomorrow night—twenty-five miles.

"You'll take my horse; he'll serve you better than any other that's left. I'll have his shoes drawn so that his hoofs will sound like a pony's when you go through the Indian lines, and so that his tracks will look like a pony's. And you had better start about ten o'clock, after the moon sets."

The Captain took back his glasses and returned them to their case. Then, after a pause, he went on slowly:

"Maloney, you're taking an awful chance. You know that?"

The trooper looked at him and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's only an even chance, sor. Av we all shtay here, we'll all be kilt, gradual, wan by wan. Oi'll make as handsome a corpse, sor, on the prairie beyant as on this hill."

Pulling at his mustache, the Captain leaned on his elbow and stared across the darkening plain at the distant Indians, gathered in knots conspiring against the beleaguered cavalry.

"You've been with me for nine years, Maloney. Let's see; down along the Rio Prieto and in the Mogollons was your first campaign with B Troop, wasn't it?"

"It was, sor."

"You've been a good soldier always; none better—on campaign. You'd have been a sergeant long ago if you'd only keep sober in garrison. Why don't you, Maloney?"

"Ah, Captain, phat fur? Once, maybe, Oi moight. But Oi've no wan to care fur excipt mesilf and no wan to care fur me. The craythers is me pleasure in loife, sor—thot an' Throop B whin she's kickin' dust."

The officer raised his brows with a pitying expression. After a moment the soldier asked timidly:

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" 'Twas in foorty-eight hours, wasn't it, sor, thot the docther said Sergeant Colton must hov a ambylance?"

Murdock looked at him quickly.

"Yes. Why?"

"He shall hov it, sor, ave Oi kin make out to live to Fort Forsyth."

"You're fond of Colton, aren't you, Maloney?"

"Aye, sor. But not so fond as a colleen at Perry's stage-house ought to be—an' will be, Oi'm thinkin', whin she wakes to phat she's lost; or ain't, as the case may be, savin' God's mercy."

The Captain, suddenly smiling at him through the dusk with a glance almost of tenderness, put out his hand and clasped that of the trooper.

"You're a brave man, Mike, with a true Irish heart. Now go and rest a bit, if you can, before you start. I'll call you when it's time."

THE thunder, booming crash on crash across the drenched night prairies, limitless as Sahara, rolled close, like the crushing wheels of some Juggernaut of the gods bent upon ironing out to the dead level of the plains every object that stood or moved upon them. The jagged lightnings forking down incessantly from torn clouds to rain-lashed earth, seemed nothing less than the whirling blades barbing the wheels of the Juggernaut.

In Perry's stage-house, cowering and trembling under the storm, strangely enough there were no travelers tonight. Mrs. Perry, her hands pressed to her temples, her eyes wide, walked the floor and moaned. Her youngest daughter crouched in a corner, face hidden in her arms, and Mr. Perry sat by the table reading a paper by the light of an oil-lamp, apparently unconcerned, as he absently fought off with his hand the bugs and moths that fluttered in a maze around the chimney.

Nancy, with pale cheeks but steady eyes, sat beside her father, one hand on his knee, and stared through the little window that gave to the north, watching the sheeted rain swirl against the glass as the lightning revealed it with fitful vividness. Where was Troop B tonight? Where was Troop B?

Suddenly she started violently at some sound she had caught above the howl of the storm; and next instant all four of them leaped to their feet with rigid muscles as something crashed heavily against the outer door. Mr. Perry's one hand reached out and snatched a long revolver from a shelf on the wall; then a voice outside called hoarsely:

"Open the dure! Fer God's sake, open the dure!"

Nancy rushed forward, jerked back the heavy bolts and threw the door wide. A gust of chilly air and a sheet of rain swept in and with it a man in blue uniform, streaming with water, who reeled a few paces across the room, then crashed toward the floor but was caught by Mrs. Perry and laid down gently. Nancy ran and knelt beside him.

"Mike Maloney!" she exclaimed.

"Throop B!" he gasped. "Throop B! On Stharved-to-Death Creek—foorty miles—three hundred Injuns!"

"You're wounded!" cried Nancy, and began pulling off his drenched blouse.

"Yis; in the back. Oi got through their loines, but the divils thrailed me to the Prairie Dog. They didn't foind me, though, begorra! Oi laid an' laughed at 'em all day till nigh sunsit. Thin they shpotted me an' Oi cut an' run fer it an' they got me under the ribs, but the sthorm come up an' they lost me ag'in; an' Oi come on in—come in. Phere did Oi come in?

"Oh, *phat* am Oi sayin'? Give me whishky! Oi'm off me nut. Tt-ah! The crayther——

"Moy God, phat am Oi tellin' about *me* fer? Miss Nancy Perry, Throop B's surrounded by three hundred hostyles on Stharved-to-Death Creek, foorty miles north-wist from here. Half the byes are wounded, an' Sergeant Frank Colton got tore woide open through the back an' chist savin' the reserve ammunition. Av he don't have a ambylance in foorty-eight hours, he's a did man; yis, the docther said so. Thot, an' re-enfoorcements from Foort Forsyth.

"Oh, lit me up! Oi've got to go on to Foort Forsyth—commandin' officer—courier from Captain Murdock."

Nancy rose to her feet. The color was back in her cheeks, and her voice was calm.

"Mother, will you please get me my riding suit out of my lower bureau drawer? Father, I'll want your slicker, dear. You know where my revolver is, Mary; please get it and load it, and light the lantern, too. But here! We must get Maloney to bed before I go, and try to make him comfortable."

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Mrs. Perry rushed to her, almost screaming.

"Nancy, you mustn't! You can not——"

"Mother, darling, please don't say anything. I can and I will, and I shall not be hurt. Who else could go?"

"This man—your father——"

"Father can not ride and protect himself, too, with one hand. Besides, he must stay here to take care of you if the Indians should come. This soldier is terribly wounded—perhaps mortally. He couldn't go another yard, brave, noble man though he is."

"But Nancy! Nancy! The Indians—the storm! Oh, wait, at least, till the storm is over!"

"Precious mother, the Indians will not be nearly so apt to find me on the road as they will be to come here, trailing Maloney. And if they *should* find me, I promise you they shall not take me alive. As for the storm, it is nothing—nothing.

"Oh, mother, think of Troop B, where it is tonight, in the storm! Perhaps already help would be too late. And Frank, wounded, lying in the rain—Frank!"

"But Nancy, I thought——"

"Oh, you should not have thought! I love him, my man, I love him! I've been a fool, a trifling, silly fool, not to tell him so all this while just because I was so sure of him and thought it amusing to let him wait. And now—now—I'm paying!"

Her father came and laid his strong arm around her and kissed her hot cheek.

"Nancy is right, mother," said he. "There's no other way. God knows, if I could go—but I might not win through, and you and Mary can't be left alone.

"If only—but no. There are those fifty men, facing a horrible death—Heavenly Father, worse than before Chickasaw Bluffs; far worse! And Frank Colton, badly wounded—your lover, Nancy—I'm proud to say it.

"Yes, you must go; and quickly. You'll win. Dearie, you're your father's own girl, a soldier's daughter, and you will win!"

They lifted Maloney to the bed in Nancy's room; and while the women cared for him and treated, as best they knew, his wound, Mr. Perry braved the unabated storm and went to the little stable to saddle their only riding-horse. Maloney roused under the hands of his ministers of mercy.

"Ah, 'tis koind to me ye are, ladies. Don't be afther throublin' about me too much. Av there's another little dhrap—ah, there! Oi kin go on to the foort; yis, Oi *must!*

"Oh, ——! Oi'm as wake as a cat! The poor byes — poor Colton! Phat's thot? *You're* goin'? *You!* Come, bind over, lit me look at ye.

"Oi knowed it! 'Tis the thrue heart ye hov, miss, whin 'tis awake. Ah, schwate Nancy Perry, fer the loikes av a colleen such as you Oi moight hov been a man mesilf, wanst on a toime, 'whin love was new an' hope was broight'! Frank Colton is a lucky bye—savin' he lives.

"But *you!* Kin ye do it, miss? Phat horse'll ye roide? Moine—Captain Murdock's—is out be the dure, av his lungs ain't busted wid runnin'."

"Father has put your horse in the barn," said Nancy. "He was almost finished. There's father, now, with mine. Good-by, Mike. Keep courage. I'll send a surgeon to you as quickly as I can."

"You will bring one back with you?" questioned Mrs. Perry anxiously.

"I will get one to him," Nancy repeated.

Outside, in the pounding rain, Tom Perry pulled her face down to his as she settled herself astride her horse.

"God guard and guide you for all our sakes, my own girl; but most for *his*."

He watched her ride away in the lightning flashes, the mud spraying up around her horse's hoofs from the ruts of the streaming, desolate emigrant road. Then he turned and went in the house, his lips set hard, his shoulders straight.

NANCY rode alternately at a gallop and a walk. The rain dashed against her face, and in spite of the drawn hood and the long, stiff sleeves of her father's slicker found its way in, trickling down her neck and up her arms. Now and then her horse shook his head protestingly and blew the water from his nostrils, and Nancy leaned over and patted him on his dripping neck.

Under her right elbow she could feel through the slicker the butt of her revolver resting against her hip. Without opening her coat she worked the holster gradually farther around to the front where it would be easier to reach, all the while narrowly watching the prairies, limitless on every side, as the lightning revealed them. But

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she was thinking little of herself. Her mind was constantly busy with calculations.

"Forty miles from our place. That's seventy from Fort Forsyth. Maloney left the troop twenty-five hours ago; I can reach the fort in five hours—perhaps. They'll have to get ready; two hours. Twenty-five and five and two are thirty-two; from forty-eight leaves sixteen. Can an ambulance travel with cavalry seventy miles—say sixty-five across country—in sixteen hours? Oh, get up, Dan! Good boy, get up!"

After a time the storm began to subside. The lightning flashes glowed less frequently and the thunder rolled farther off, without its former instant, ripping crash; though still the rain fell heavily. In the diminishing brief intervals of vision offered by the lightning the girl's eyes searched the prairies with more intense scrutiny.

At last came a brief flash during which her heart leaped into her throat. Inky blackness followed, as always, and convulsively she pulled Dan to a stop and, tearing open her slicker, drew her revolver. Something she had seen on the road ahead that looked like horsemen; three or four of them.

"Oh, Heavenly Father," prayed Nancy, "let it not be Indians. Not for my sake; I am not afraid to die. But for Frank and Troop B."

The next flash seemed hours in coming. When it did, the objects ahead had not moved, and she could not be sure whether they were horsemen or not. She waited for another gleam; then, still uncertain but determined, rode ahead. Presently she found them to be some patches of mullein stalks beside the road, and with lightened heart urged Dan again to a swift gallop.

The rain ceased, the lightning moved far away southward and here and there a star gleamed through breaking clouds. Nancy pushed back the oilskin hood and drew her tam-o'-shanter cap more tightly over her hair.

The night air was chill, reeking with moisture, and so quiet that it seemed Dan's hoofs, splash-splashing through mire and water, made echoes against the wall of silence all around.

Only by the splashing could she be sure that he was in the road. When his feet thudded on hard prairie turf she pulled him to right or left till the splashing came again, though for the most part he held the trail himself, as a prairie-bred horse will do.

At length—after two or three hours, as nearly as she could tell—she became conscious, rather by feeling than by sight, that she was passing close by a house. There could be no doubt of what house it was; there was only one between her home and the fort.

"Fingerling's stage-house," said she to herself. "The Owl Creek bridge is just beyond — fourteen miles from the fort. There's no light. Shall I wake them? No, what use? It would only mean delay. It must be past one o'clock — twenty-eight hours. Frank, out there on the prairie, groaning. Can an ambulance travel sixty-five miles in sixteen hours? Get up, Dan! Get up, boy!"

IT WAS after three, for one can not ride a panting horse always at a hard gallop over an invisible road, when her straining eyes caught a gleam through the velvet curtain ahead and knew it for the light in the guard-house of Fort Forsyth. Ten minutes later she was standing in the parlor in the house of the commanding officer, with that gentleman, his eyes still somewhat dazed from sleep, staring at her wonderingly across the lamp on the Louis Quinze center-table. But his eyes very quickly ceased to be dazed.

"Yes, yes, Miss Perry; we will, without a moment's unnecessary delay. On Starved-to-Death Creek; a devilish place to be caught! Oh, Lord, yes, I know the place—could find it with my eyes bandaged. An awful desert-hole. Poor Murdock!

"Orderly! Oh, adjutant, did you wake up? Good! Miss Perry, Lieutenant Van Dyke. Adjutant, have Troops C and E called up at once, ready to march—" he looked at his watch—"at five o'clock."

"Seventeen hours," thought Nancy. "Oh, thank God!"

"Rations and forage for four days," went on the commanding officer. "Two days' extras for Troop B and six thousand rounds ammunition on pack-mules, the men to carry forty rounds. One ambulance—no, both. They will be needed. That's all. Have everything ready at five. I'll take command. It's a forced march, Van Dyke, to Bob Murdock. He's hemmed in on Starved-to-Death Creek."

The adjutant uttered an explosive ejaculation, saluted and vanished.

"Be seated, Miss Perry," pursued the

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officer. "My wife will be down in a moment and show you to a room. You must be exhausted. You're a brave girl—very. Will you excuse me? I must get ready."

"Major," said Nancy quietly, "thank you, but I don't want a room. I am going with you."

The commanding officer whirled around in the doorway.

"You are—*what?*"

"I am going with you, sir; with the relief column."

"Indeed, you are *not.* What an idea! You, with a cavalry column, going spang into the Indians!"

"Major, I have my own horse. If I can't ride with the column, I can ride behind it. You can not prevent me, sir, from doing that."

"But, Miss Perry, who ever heard—what earthly reason——"

"Major, there is a soldier with Troop B; Sergeant — acting First Sergeant — Frank Colton. I—I'm engaged to be married to him. He was wounded, sir, badly wounded —Private Maloney told me—saving the reserve ammunition. He may die; he will if an ambulance is not there in seventeen more hours. If he should be dying when you reach there, and I not there—Major——"

The commanding officer came and laid a fatherly hand on her shoulder.

"Miss Perry, you're as good a soldier as Frank Colton, and he's of the best; too good to be only a non-commissioned officer. You will ride in one of the ambulances, where you can rest, and your horse will be led behind."

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you!" As he once more started for the door she added: "You will send a surgeon to our place, sir, for Private Maloney?"

"A surgeon will start by six o'clock. Yes, with an escort. That road's too dangerous to travel just now without a strong guard."

AT FIVE o'clock the next afternoon, the sun still high and hot, though not so hot as on preceding days, Nancy was leaning back against a rolled blanket under the sheltering top of the ambulance. The canvas curtains on the left side had been let down by the driver so that the sun would not blind her eyes—too pretty eyes, thought the driver, to be blinded by the sun.

The ambulance rolled smoothly over the hard prairie, swinging on its easy springs, the horses at a trot.

Before it rode one troop of cavalry, and behind it the other ambulance, the pack-mules, and then the second troop. Nancy felt a trifle easier in mind; they were going to be in time.

But even if they were in time, would it still be all right? Was it so certain that he would live, after all, through the heat and the pelting rain, the suffering, the lack of water, the searching bullets? Would any of them be alive when the relief column reached them? She crushed down such misgivings with compressed lips. They were going to be in time.

All at once she was aware that the ambulance was stopping. She glanced out in front. The leading troop was going at a trot out of column into line. Far ahead she saw some cavalrymen galloping swiftly back toward the main body, with many other horsemen coming behind. Then she heard a rifle-shot; another; then several. The troop in rear also began deploying, and the second ambulance pulled up beside her own. She leaned forward and said to her driver:

"What is it? Who are those people out there?"

"Indians, ma'am. They're going to attack us." His voice was grave. "Gee! Poor boys!" he added.

"Why," said Nancy incredulously, "we can't be in much danger. There aren't a hundred of them, are there? Surely all these soldiers can beat them off."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of *us.* We're all right, of course; scratch them devils off like fleas. I was thinking of Troop B."

"Troop B? I don't understand. What of them?"

The driver had bethought himself of whom he was speaking to.

"Oh—ah—well—nothing, miss! Just nothing."

The Indians had come close and begun to circle. Carbines along the front of the advance troop were popping, but Nancy did not heed them. Her eyes were widening.

"Yes, there is," she insisted. "Tell me. You think these Indians have been fighting Troop B?"

"Yes, miss."

"And then—and then—why have they left?"

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"Well, miss, to tell you the truth, if you will know, it looks bad. It looks to me as if the redskins must have cleaned out Troop B and left the field, or else part of 'em are just cleaning 'em out and the rest have come back here to hold us till the job's done. Whoa, Betsy! What the ——! That bullet was ten feet over your fool head!"

Nancy was silent with sheer suffocating horror. Oh, if only a bullet would come and stop her thinking and suffering! In a moment the driver exclaimed:

"See, now! The Major, he thinks like I do. He's going ahead in line and let 'em shoot and be—hanged. Trotting, too. Oh, maybe we'll save a few. Poor cusses! You oughtn't be here, miss."

"I ought to be nowhere else," said Nancy, staring ahead between the swaying bodies of the men in the battle-line for the first glimpse of a low hill far in front.

The sun was just dropping into the west when the advance line mounted a ridge. The Indians had fallen away; the last of them were disappearing over the horizon to the right. The soldiers began to talk.

"There's Starved-to-Death Creek, over here on the right."

"What's that, there on the next ridge? Oh, Lord! I guess it's the last of 'em! Those are dead horses."

"But, shucks! There ain't over half a dozen of 'em. And, say, those horses have been dead for days; see their legs stickin' up? Maybe the boys are somewhere else."

They crossed a little valley and mounted the hill of the dead horses.

"There! Look! See that black bunch on that next hill?"

"Oh, holy Moses, it's movin'! It's *them!*"

"They're wavin'; they're throwin' hats in the air!"

"There go our bugles. Gallop? You bet yer life! Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Oh, say, ain't I glad I'm here? Ain't this just jim dandy? We're in time, boys, we're in time!"

UP ON the hill of desperate defense, among a ruck of dead and wounded horses and dead and wounded men, of scattered saddles and blankets and of shallow rifle-pits dug with kit-knives and finger-nails, the Major gripped the hand of the Captain, who, hollow-eyed, grimy and dizzy with weariness, but game and smiling, stepped forward to greet him.

"Thank God, Bob, old man, we've pulled you out. You've had a fearful time, haven't you?"

"Bad enough, Fred. It's been a nightmare. But brave old Maloney got through!"

"Yes, far enough. How many have you lost?"

"Nineteen clear out of business; twelve badly wounded, seven dead. There's one of 'em down there; poor Finnigan. We've never been able to get his body in. Nearly all the horses are gone. Last night's storm was hard on the wounded.

"But the Indians! They'd charge by day and crawl up on us by night, and everlastingly sniping, sniping. But the last was the worst. They saw you coming and detached a force to hold you while the rest closed in to wipe us out.

"Never saw anything like it—right up to our muzzles. Don't know who their war chief is, but he's a red John B. Hood. Such pounding tactics! They thought our ammunition was out, and it was, nearly; not five rounds apiece left now.

"We've lost five men in the last hour and a half, and another hour would have finished us. Oh, they gave us a tussle, and we made them suffer fearfully. I've an idea they'll not raid across the emigrant road again soon. But they're brave, curse 'em! Poor devils, fighting for their prairies. Ah, well! How's my wife?"

"All right. Badly frightened, of course, but she will get over that."

"Yes, bless her! It's hard on women. And Maloney?"

"Wounded at the Prairie Dog, he said; he was trailed there, you know. He's at Perry's stage-house." The Major cleared his throat. He had not once looked at the place where the wounded lay, the ambulances now beside them. "Say, Murdock, how is Sergeant Colton?"

"Alive yet, and I pray will live. He's doing well, considering. The gamest man of all; never a whimper, all these days and nights. He earned the Medal of Honor, Major; saved us all by saving our reserve ammunition. Want to see him? He's right over there. He's—why—why—what's that? In Heaven's name, a woman—*here?*"

"Yes. She came with us. That's Nancy Perry, Bob, the bravest woman I ever

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knew. She's kneeling by Colton now, see? She's his sweetheart. A Spartan pair, eh? She's the one that saved you. She brought Maloney's message from the stage-house to the fort last night, through the storm and danger of Indians, and insisted upon coming right on with us for fear Colton might be dying. God, Bob, what women this West of ours breeds!"

Over on the crest, beside the ambulances, Nancy knelt on the ground by Colton's side and in the early twilight they looked into one another's faces and knew no world outside.

"Nancy," he said, "I'm dreaming. It's impossible you are here—and because you love me. I've dreamed it so hard all these long, long hours that now I believe it."

"No, dear heart, you believe it because it's true. I will be with you always now. No more a wicked trifler with your love—oh, how could I ever have been, when always I loved you only?"

He reached out and plucked from the earth beside him a little wilted weed, but one which was now in full blossom. With feeble fingers he thrust its stem among the dark tresses of the fair head bending low above him, and said:

"There, goldenrod, flower of the battle, that is your destiny. Nancy, little girl, through all the hours I've dreamed of seeing that little flower in your dark hair. But never in my wildest dreams did I half see how sweet it would look there, when the dream came true."

The Obscure Move

by Charles Wadsworth Camp

HIS friends have never understood why Morgan, one of the best of private detectives, gave up the excitements of the trail for the stupid dignity of office management. Morgan naturally didn't care to talk about it at first. Time is a good carpenter, however, and Morgan feels now that he may safely stand on the record. Here it is.

To begin with, Morgan was an odd one. If you had questioned him about the deductive method, he would have laughed good-naturedly. It is equally certain that the mention of psychological analysis would have sent him to the dictionary for a clue. Common sense and a sense of humor were his own stock in trade. His specialty was the smooth crook who keeps the money of the carelessly avaricious in circulation. Consequently he wore expensive clothing himself. Furthermore, he was fast acquiring an appearance of rotund prosperity quite out of key with the best-loved traditions of the stealthy profession. Still he was one of the most successful in that business.

Therefore when the Duncan Investment Company closed its doors it was not surprising that the victims should have carried their resentment from the formal optimism of police headquarters to Morgan's agency.

Duncan, they explained, had fled with large sums which he had persuaded them to invest through a trifling lure of from fifty

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to a hundred per cent. They were law-abiding citizens none the less, and they felt it their duty to society to see that Duncan, who had taken so much, should also receive what was judicially owing to him.

Morgan lighted a fresh perfecto.

"Rest easy," he told his clients. "I'll place Mr. Duncan in an iron cage where you can poke your fingers at him all you like."

After the sheep had flocked out, he gazed about his comfortable office, filled his pockets with cigars, locked his cellarette, and set forth on his adventures.

MORGAN took the customary precautions in case the confidence man had his heart set on Canada or a trip abroad. But Duncan was too wary to thrust his head in the lion's jaw through any such first-offense methods. Instead he revealed the attributes of an eel, squirming, dodging, and once or twice nearly slipping across the Mexican border. The stout, good-natured detective, however, seemed to possess a special intuition. Time and again he made Duncan turn on his tracks. Then a very natural thing happened. When the chase got too hot, Duncan, who had been born and raised in Florida, sought ground which would be far more familiar to him than to his pursuer. Yet Morgan, entering Florida, was reminiscent of nothing so much as a fat, grinning cat, approaching the holeless corner into which he has driven his mouse.

When the police channels had run dry, the detective called on that peculiar intuition of his and bothered the lumber, turpentine, and phosphate men until he had located the fugitive in a timber-camp, far in the wilderness.

Morgan's work had chiefly lain in comfort-furnished cities, but by rail, by boat, by springless wagon, he bravely followed the trail. One crisp morning he reached his destination—a group of tiny unpainted cabins, clustered about a sawmill and a commissary.

With a look of high achievement lighting his face, Morgan shook the camp superintendent's hand.

"Peary and Amundsen and Doctor Cook have nothing on me," he said. "Just remind me to jot down my latitude and longitude so people'll believe I've really been here."

"How come you to suspect he was here?" the superintendent asked.

"Perhaps a fortune-teller saw it in the cards," Morgan laughed softly.

"What you laughing at?" the superintendent asked suspiciously.

"The idea of Beau Duncan's living here! Which may be his stylish bungalow?"

"His quarters, you mean? The shanty yonder with the busted window-light."

"And some of the best hotels have stopped paying dividends since he left town. Where's old Beau Brummel Duncan now? At the golf club?"

"Naw," the superintendent said. "I allow he's doing an honest day's work on the skidder. That's about three miles from here."

"The president of your company told me you were a deputy sheriff."

The superintendent proudly displayed his badge.

"Maybe it puts us in the same criminal class with Duncan," Morgan said, "but we're paid to work. Let's make a bluff anyway."

The superintendent led two rawboned little horses from the corral. He considered Morgan's portly person with a thoughtful eye, then brought a soap-box from the commissariat. Morgan mounted to the soap-box and thence to the saddle. He settled himself gingerly.

Proceeding cautiously, they followed the lumber tramway until they came to an open space where a donkey engine was noisily loading logs on a string of flat-cars. At first Morgan thought that the workers about the engine were all negroes, but finally he realized that, except for dirt and grime, one of them was white.

"According to the descriptions, that ought to be my affinity," he observed.

They dismounted, and as the horses had shown no exceptional aggressiveness, they left the animals loose to crop the wiry grass. Morgan followed the superintendent in a wide and casual circle toward the donkey engine. The superintendent, as if he were showing off the activities of the clearing to an interested stranger, frequently stopped to point with broad gestures in one direction or another.

"Better cut that stuff," Morgan warned. "Remember, Duncan isn't any stage crook. He has real brains."

Duncan, in fact, had already turned from

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his work. He leaned on his log-hook, staring at the detective. Then he carefully placed the hook on a flat-car, thrust his hands in his pockets, and loafed in the direction of the horses. Morgan and the superintendent quickened their pace. Evidently that was sufficient proof for Duncan, for with a yell he threw pretense aside, vaulted a log and broke into a run.

MORGAN started heavily after him, but Duncan was younger, slenderer, and much better conditioned. By the time Morgan had reached his horse and had clambered to the saddle in apparent defiance of the laws of gravity, Duncan was already well away on a sandy track which entered the woods at a right angle to the tramway.

Morgan set his teeth as he urged his horse to a gallop. Swaying from side to side or bobbing up and down with surprised little grunts, he clutched impulsively at the animal's mane and went in pursuit.

The track wound into the virgin forest. Almost immediately the landscape seemed to conspire lawlessly for the protection of the fugitive. The trees thickened. A dense underbrush sprang up. A growth of saplings cluttered the soil between the trunks. Morgan's horse was a self-centered brute. In worming his quick way among the saplings, he allowed only for his own emaciated body. Consequently the detective had to look out for his own too solid person.

The last Morgan saw of him, Duncan was going through a black, shallow stream, his hand upraised in a mocking and undignified farewell. And the last Morgan heard of him was laughter—unrestrained, joyous, insulting.

Morgan plodded ahead, hoping that the hummock would soon give way to open forest land where he might wear the fugitive down. But the underbrush closed more riotously about him. There were many stagnant pools which obscured and finally obliterated Duncan's trail. Morgan brought his horse to a halt. He half fell from his saddle and looked about him, for once at a loss.

Towering yellow slash-pine spread their green-plumed tops in a roof so thick that the sun could force its way through only at long intervals. Scrub palmettos, like huge caterpillars, squirmed along the ground and thrust green tentacles upward from their ends. The ground was soggy underfoot, and the air was hot, damp, and full of decay.

"This," Morgan muttered, "is somewhat more of a place than a panorama of Hades."

He took off his hat, drew an immaculate linen handkerchief from his pocket, and mopped his heated brow. Duncan had undoubtedly given him the slip for the present. His best scheme was to return to the lumber camp, where he could arrange to watch the outlets of the forest.

He mounted with considerable difficulty and with strategy turned his horse's head. But the many stagnant pools had confused his own trail as thoroughly as they had Duncan's. When the sun set he made a wry face and acknowledged he was lost.

The prospect of spending the night in the swamp was very annoying to one of Morgan's habits. Since his lungs were perfectly sound he had never interested himself in all this talk about outdoor sleeping, but he was ready to back at odds the fact that it couldn't be done either comfortably or beneficially here. The ground was too wet for one thing, and, for another, it was probably full of snakes. Yet he was certain his raw-boned horse couldn't support him all night.

He tumbled to the ground again, tied the horse to a sapling, and walked to a fallen log. After he had thoroughly searched the neighborhood for reptiles, he sat down and munched some of the sweet chocolate he always carried for emergencies. Then he lighted a red-banded Havana. His heart sank at the recollection that his pocket carried only two more of those luxuries.

While he smoked, the drowsy wood-life of the warm day melted into a new note as the melancholy creatures of night awoke. Morgan shivered.

He sprang upright at a rustling in the grass behind the log. Snakes, he was sure! He remembered reading somewhere that hunters built fires as a protection against lions and tigers. It might work with snakes. He gathered a pile of sticks and started a meager blaze. Then he lay down, but rest was not easy in the swamp. An owl declaimed its dismal periods near by. A whip-poorwill called disconsolately. A high-pitched, vibrant outcry brought him erect, his hand on his revolver. Then all was still.

It began to rain. He saw his fire diminish and die. He fancied the rustlings were closer, and he had no idea what hunters did

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when their fires went out. He lifted his feet. He hugged his knees. In this unprofessional attitude he spent the remainder of the night without sleep.

When the gray dawn came he looked in vain for his horse. The broken bridle dangled eloquently from the sapling.

CHILLED to the bone and wet, Morgan set out, determined to make Duncan pay in some way for this night just past. These pleasant thoughts served to pass the time, but they brought him no nearer the edge of the swamp. When night fell his weariness overcame his fear of snakes, and he slept.

By rare good luck he shot a wild turkey the next morning and managed to broil it over a smoldering fire. Near that fire he stayed all day, for it still rained and he felt rheumatic.

Another night came, and another day of rain. He lost track of time. The feeling that he had spent most of his life in the swamp depressed him. As a matter of fact it was the fifth day when the storm finally ceased.

Morgan, sitting in the warm, bland sunlight, took stock of himself. He was undecided as to whether the rheumatism or his lack of tobacco hurt the more. He had only two cartridges left, and from past experience he knew they might not bring him a single morsel. His clothes were rags. It behooved him to escape from this hole, rheumatism or no rheumatism.

With the sun shining he could be reasonably sure he was keeping to a straight line. But the swamp was evidently interminable. His lack of success pricked his anger against Duncan. He swore aloud.

"Let me get my hands on that slick article who got me into this! Just let me see him! Just let me get within striking distance!"

It was about this time that he turned pale and leaned weakly against a tree. He had heard a man shout.

As he opened his lips he wondered if the rain, the cold, the long disuse had affected his voice. Would it respond to his will at this vital moment? It was more than a shout. It was a roar that left his throat. And from somewhere a voice answered, triumphantly, hysterically.

Almost immediately Morgan saw a man running toward him, splashing through pools, waving his arms, crying out incoherently. Morgan straightened and began running, too, in the direction of this figure so like a scarecrow. It was a human being. It meant companionship, conversation, a touch of the world again. Heaven knew he needed all that!

Then Morgan saw that it was Duncan. At the same moment Duncan saw that it was Morgan.

Duncan sprang behind a tree. He thrust his arms out in frantic gestures. Morgan drew his revolver. He walked steadily forward.

"Duncan, my dear, it's struck twelve. Come on out now and take your medicine."

"Gently! Gently!" Duncan called. "I give you fair warning!"

Morgan walked faster.

"Fire away. I'll take my chances."

"Don't misunderstand me," Duncan said. "I haven't a gun. Do you think I would harm a hair of your head if I had? I have a better weapon than that. Come any closer and I'll run like the deuce."

Morgan stopped. Vengeance was in his heart, but he permitted himself a glimpse at the reverse of the picture.

"Duncan! For Heaven's sake, don't do that!"

"Then you'll listen to reason?"

Morgan smiled again.

"It's a bluff, Duncan. Maybe you can run, but you haven't the nerve."

"Be reasonable or you'll see," Duncan threatened. "I'm a human being. So are you, I take it."

Morgan's smile broadened.

"Don't be foolish with other people's money and bet on it."

Duncan pulled at the torn fringe of his shirt-sleeves. He shifted his feet.

"Suppose I surrendered," he said. "Could you get me out of here?"

"I can't seem to find a taxi for myself," Morgan replied. "But I'll land you in the cooler yet."

"If we live," Duncan said, "and nothing happens, and all goes well—*et Deus vult.*"

"Don't swear in a foreign tongue," Morgan answered.

"Let's confer on the main problem," Duncan proposed. "I want a truce."

"All right," sighed Morgan. "And when we're through you can go play Indian again."

Duncan stepped out. His hair was heavy and tangled. The thick, black growth on

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his face made his eyes seem very large and hungry.

"If I had had you along," Morgan said, "I needn't have been afraid of the snakes."

Duncan came straight to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"You don't know how good it is to see you, Morgan."

Morgan's voice was a little husky as he added—

"Say, you don't happen to have a cigar hidden away on your clothes?"

"No, but I retain the essentials."

He produced a large sack of cheap flake tobacco and a package of cigarette papers.

"I never smoked those puff rolls," Morgan said disappointedly.

"Permit me to roll it for you," Duncan offered.

They sat on a log, shoulders touching, while they smoked contentedly.

"So you're Bob Morgan!" Duncan said. "The famous Morgan!"

"Glad to meet you, Duncan," Morgan said gruffly. "But I don't want to tap any wires or buy any green-goods. Let that be understood."

"Morgan," Duncan announced, shaking his head. "There is something radically wrong with us."

"Better patent that discovery. You might get the Nobel Prize."

Duncan shook his head again.

"No," he continued. "We're not living up to tradition."

"I'm scarcely living at all," Morgan said.

"For a detective and a fugitive," Duncan declared, "we show extraordinary good sense."

"Cut it, and prepare me another whiff of joy."

But Duncan good-humoredly refused to manufacture any more cigarettes until Morgan had consented to some working arrangement.

The decision to join forces until they had found a way out of the swamp, if the thing could be done, was the matter of a moment. That the chase should recommence once they were out was also agreed to at once. They divided only on the start the detective should give the criminal. Morgan offered half an hour, and Duncan demanded half a day.

Morgan wanted to smoke. Duncan was hungry for meat. Morgan produced from his pocket a few small bones to which tiny shreds of turkey still clung, and these he kept prominently in view while the other carelessly dangled the paper and the tobacco-bag in his fingers. They began to compromise.

By the time they had settled on an hour and a half the sun was down. They made camp.

THE gobbling of wild turkeys awoke them at dawn. They crept to a clump of palmettos at the foot of a dead cypress. As the sky lightened behind the gibbet-like branches a row of birds appeared in silhouette. Morgan rested his arm against a palmetto trunk, aimed, and brought one of the birds down.

The turkey solved the food problem for the present, and as long as the sun shone they knew their chances for speedy escape were good. But the clouds turned black again in the afternoon, and a dismal downpour commenced.

"Doesn't it do anything but rain in this hole?" Morgan grieved.

"We are below the snow-line," Duncan explained. "I suggest camping here before we start walking in circles."

They made a fire and by the last daylight gathered a heap of wood.

Duncan regretted their lack of a pack of cards to pass the time. This gave Morgan a thought.

"You don't happen by any crazy chance to play chess, Duncan?"

"I know something more than the moves."

"Three cheers!" Morgan cried.

He felt in his pocket and brought forth a small pocket chessboard.

"When I'm traveling alone I often irritate myself working problems on this."

They moved closer to the fire, tossed for sides and arranged the markers. In a few minutes their minds were far away from the swamp and their plight. They were well matched. Morgan, who had the white pieces, opened with a brilliant, puzzling attack on the king's side; but Duncan, with confidence and forethought, combined his forces in a flawless defense.

As they recognized each other's ability they took more time for their moves. Morgan would lean forward, pursing his lips, studious lines showing on his forehead, while Duncan, eyes intent on the board, would roll a couple of cigarettes, pass one to

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his opponent, reach out his hand to the fire and offer a burning brand for a light.

It was very exciting. Perhaps they saw in the game a symbol of their relations—detective against criminal, and both most excellent players. Late at night Morgan unmasked his rooks and trapped Duncan's knight on the king's line.

Duncan leaned back.

"You play a strong game, Morgan."

The detective was pleased by his victory.

"You're pretty good practise for me, Bo," he conceded. "But you ought to have left that pawn of mine alone. It was a gold brick. Oh! Excuse me for reminding you. Hello! It's still raining."

The storm ceased the next day for only a few minutes. They did not travel far, because Morgan complained of what he called his growing pains.

That night they played chess again. Duncan won.

"A game apiece," Morgan said. "Tomorrow night'll be the rubber. Waterloo won't be jackstones to what I'll do to you."

BUT Morgan was in no condition to walk the next day. He lay by the smoldering fire, inclined to complain.

"Another twenty-four hours and you'll be all right," Duncan said cheerily.

"I'll never be all right again," Morgan lamented.

Duncan dried enough sticks and moss at the fire to make a crude bed. He lifted Morgan from the wet ground and prepared a soup of turkey bones and roots in the detective's drinking-cup. Morgan drank it with relish, but his ailments occupied his mind to the exclusion of chess. So Duncan sat at his side, watching the fire and trying to keep up his spirits.

The last clouds sailed away in the morning. The cold, wet weather was routed. But Morgan's vocabulary was not sufficiently large to let him walk far at a time. After several attempts he gave up and lay down, groaning.

"Poor old Morgan," Duncan said, leaning sympathetically over him.

"Go to the corner and send in an ambulance call," Morgan answered with a grimace. "Then bid me farewell before it begins to pour again. If you hang around for me we'll both die of water on the brain."

Duncan patted his shoulder.

"For Heaven's sake, don't get delirious, Bob."

For some time Morgan frowned at the fire.

"Bo," he said at last, "I mean it. I haven't got the build for a millstone. Besides, I can't be under any obligations. I can't let pleasure interfere with business. If you get out do me just two favors. Send a posse in for me and wire the office to get another man after you as quick as lightning."

"My position is very simple," Duncan answered. "I wouldn't leave you if you offered me title to all the real estate in this swamp."

Morgan grinned.

"Still talking shop! Say, Bo, you may be a Southern cavalier and me a Yankee born, but I never took fifty per cent., and I see ten suckers in my business any day where you see one."

"No use trying to get me mad, Bobbie. I'm too selfish to leave you and face this cheerless world alone."

"Well, just remember, Bo, I'll get you. As sure as the whole world's gone to grass and water, I'll get you."

"I admire ambition," Duncan said. "I regret that I can not encourage it in this instance. But the matter need not trouble us at present. Let me make you comfortable; then I'll roll you another cigarette."

He carried Morgan to a sunny spot and gave his limbs a thorough, hard massage. Afterward the detective struggled up and began to walk in a crouching position. Duncan cut a stout stick for him. He took his arm and helped him all he could.

"You're sure full of sand, Bob," he said.

Without answering, Morgan walked on. Now and then he would pause, but always after a few minutes' rest he would start forward again. By and by his figure crouched less and his steps grew longer.

He was exhausted when they camped again, but the worst of his pains had left him, and it was he who proposed after supper that they play the rubber game.

"I'm an awful object to think about," he explained. "Men have gone nutty over less. I've got to get my mind off myself. Besides, I'd like to know who's the better man. If I hadn't lost sight of one thing last time there wouldn't have been anything to it."

The game was slow. Each was determined to win, so each took as long as he

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pleased for his moves. Morgan, when he could scarcely keep his eyes open, suggested that they postpone the finish until the next evening.

"I guess I'm trained a little fine," he said. "I don't want to make a slip."

"It looks like a draw to me," Duncan answered.

"It looked as though I'd get out of this swamp the day I came in, but did I? Study the board. I can see more than one way to slip over a knockout."

Duncan laughed.

"I'm afraid you'll never win this game."

"I've got to and I will," Morgan said. "I'll bet you three pine-trees and a case of swamp water—magnums!"

THEY were off by the time the sun had slipped its first long shadows through the swamp. Morgan was convalescent. He walked steadily onward, resting one hand on Duncan's shoulder. They talked of the unfinished game, which had assumed colossal proportions in their dwarfed minds. But that rubber was destined never to be finished. It was a little after noon when Morgan said in a hushed voice—

"Bo, wait a minute."

"What's the matter?" Duncan whispered as he stopped.

"This darned swamp's thinning."

"It had occurred to me," Duncan agreed. "I was afraid to speak of it."

"Look at those palmetto clumps," Morgan went on excitedly. "They're not as high or as thick. There isn't as much water. Bo, old boy, I believe we're going to get out!"

"There's certainly higher ground ahead," Duncan answered. "Come on, Bobbie."

They struggled through the last of the underbrush and stepped into the open pine forest. There was hard soil or sand beneath their feet. About them the sun laid warm, caressing fingers of light. Insects droned and birds sang joyously. Before long they came to trees scarred by the turpentiners, and later to a wood-road.

They paused and stood awkwardly for a few minutes without words. The road, narrow, twisting, and overgrown, screamed of civilization, of populous cities, of marts noisy with commerce.

"We've discovered America," Morgan said.

"Yes," replied Duncan. In a moment he added, "I believe you agreed to give me an hour and a half. Therefore I will continue my travels."

Morgan looked at him with an air of childish wonder.

"So I did," he answered dreamily. "An hour and a half!"

He pulled his wits together.

"Cross my heart, I'll stay where I am for an hour and a half after I lose sight of you."

"Quite satisfactory," Duncan said.

"Before you go," Morgan began uncomfortably, "I'd like to hand you a few words of thanks on this auspicious occasion."

"There's no question of thanks," Duncan protested politely. "Undoubtedly we were mutually helpful."

Morgan extended his hand.

"Bo, good-by."

He essayed a little humor.

"That is, so long. It won't be many days before we meet again. I am looking forward to it."

Duncan took the detective's hand.

"This is an eternal farewell. In some ways I regret it. Good-by, Bob. You're sure you can navigate until you come to a house?"

"Sure. I'll steer into the first dry dock I see and have them light a fire under me to dry me out."

Their hands dropped. Duncan hesitated. Finally he put his fingers in his pocket, pulled out tobacco and paper, and rolled a cigarette. He handed it to Morgan, who mechanically placed it between his lips. Then he turned and strode off through the woods.

Morgan sat down. He watched, until it was out of sight, the tall, gaunt figure about which ragged clothing flapped. Very soon he became restless. He opened the chessboard to study the unfinished game. His line of attack was perfectly clear in his mind now. As move by move its beauties unfolded he chuckled quietly. Duncan was helpless. Suddenly his chuckling ceased. There was one obscure move that Duncan might have offered in reply. It would have spoiled the entire combination. Yet it was the advancing of a pawn on the extreme flank, and its immediate significance appeared of minor importance.

"Duncan wasn't wise to it," he told himself. And after a moment, "Could Duncan have been hep?"

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He puzzled over the board for a long time. He arose and paced back and forth.

"He might have forced a draw with that move," he mused, "or even a winning attack. I've got to know what he would have done. I'll ask him when I nab him."

He took out his watch. Duncan had been gone two hours.

Morgan didn't follow the route Duncan had taken. The memory of his lonely wanderings kept him in the road which brought him before dark to a turpentine camp. He accepted the foreman's hospitality for the night.

He set out early the next morning with the foreman's horse and buggy which he was to send back from the nearest railroad station, five hours away. The road was long and monotonous, but he sat at his ease, smoking bad cigars which he had bought at the camp, and singing snatches of popular songs in praise of his release from muscular effort.

His thoughts of Duncan centered about the uncompleted game of chess. While he was confident that Duncan's capture was only a matter of time, he refused to bother his head with definite plans until he reached the railroad.

The appearance of the country had not altered when the shriek of a locomotive whistle warned him that his ride was nearly ended. He touched the whip to his horse for the first time, and was soon on the right of way. He saw the glittering lines of steel, a rough section-house and a water-tank; but in front of him the woods were as thick as those he had just left. He pulled up, thoroughly puzzled, for he had expected to find a station at this crossing.

SUDDENLY his curiosity died. His indolent figure stiffened. His hand went to his coat pocket where the revolver with its single remaining cartridge lay. A filthy man in rags was trying to conceal himself behind one of the insufficient tank supports.

Morgan stepped from the buggy, leveling his revolver.

"Duncan," he said, "I warned you it was 'so-long'."

"It's Morgan, of all the world," Duncan answered, but his smile was sickly. "If that train had only stopped I'd have missed this pleasant reunion."

"You ought to be grateful. Nice people are waiting to weep on your neck up North. Come on out and let's hurry home."

"Not so fast, Morgan. I can easily get away from you. But I confess a strong desire to finish that game. Suppose for that purpose we arrange another truce."

"We'll finish it on the train," Morgan answered with a grin. "I've got you beaten so many ways I blush to think of it."

"Have you?" Duncan asked slyly. "How about that pawn? I win!"

Morgan's mouth opened. His revolver arm dropped.

"You never saw that——"

Duncan sprang from behind his post and bounded across the right of way for the woods.

Morgan raised his arm again.

"Stop or I'll shoot!"

But Duncan ran the faster. The muzzle of Morgan's revolver was pointed at the fugitive's back. He had brought down wild turkeys. The result was certain.

Then his arm swayed gently to one side. The movement seemed almost involuntary. He pulled the trigger. He sped his last cartridge into the heart of an innocent pine tree.

He flung the gun away and started in pursuit. When he reached the edge of the woods Duncan had disappeared. Morgan sank to the ground. He rubbed his knees ruefully. He shook his head. He shrugged his shoulders. Sitting there in a heap, he lighted one of his vile cigars.

"That blasted rheumatism!" he moaned. "That blasted rheumatism! It must have jumped to my gun arm. I'll have to report sick. I'm not worth a hill of beans at this business as I am. I wonder if I've got something besides rheumatism?"

As he blew the stinging smoke from his nostrils he smiled reminiscently.

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The Veiled Samaritan

by Thomas Samson Miller.

Author of "The Island of Asaba."

"WOULD it be impolite to inquire into Madame's object in undertaking so perilous a journey?"

"It might and it might not, but it would be entirely useless."

Madame turned her black, lively eyes boldly on her inquisitor, and returned fire.

"Would it be impolite, Mr. Low, to question your inquisitiveness?"

"Inquisitiveness is my business; as political officer of the company that looks on Nigeria, and especially the Great Caravan Route to Timbuctu, as its special trading ground, I am naturally interested in any whites idling about the company's preserves. You see, I am frank."

"Do you favor Mr. Clapperton with the same inquisitive interest?"

"Mr. Clapperton is a well-known explorer; his book on the Tuaregs is a classic, and, besides——"

"Besides what? Don't hesitate, Mr. Low. I guess I can stand it."

"Then, in the first place, he does not claim French origin and speak with an American accent; and, if he is an adventurer, his adventures are——"

"Strictly proper."

"Exactly."

"Mine aren't?" snapped Madame.

"Well, you'll admit that you left Lady Wilson's service under what we might call —er—suspicious circumstances."

Madame's eyes snapped and she parted rouged lips, but quickly converted the indiscreet rejoinder into a pout, and gained time by reaching for her cigarette case. When she spoke there was a plaintive throb in her voice.

"I was the victim of circumstances and that unprincipled brother of mine."

"Brother?" Low interjected, and turned his head to the steamer's prow lest she see his smile.

"Brother," she repeated firmly. "When it was known that I had a brother aboard, and that he had debarked at Sierra Leone on the very night the jewels were stolen, her ladyship at once accused me of complicity. If it had happened in America I would have had her jailed for criminal libel."

"Too bad," Low responded nonchalantly. "And the maid was dismissed?"

"The *companion* resigned," Madame sharply corrected. "You needn't make it worse than it was. A lone woman fighting her own way has sometimes to take mean positions."

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"Especially when there is a bad brother to live down."

"Rub it in; I'm only one woman with two men on a two-by-four steamer in the middle of the Niger, so you can be just as rude as your nature, without fear of being called to account. Perhaps at Lokoja I shall be rid of your company," she said, looking across the wine-dark river at scattered lights that flickered brightly on the northern bank.

"That would give you free rein with Clapperton to the coast," said Low, offering no encouragement.

"What is that to you?"

"Oh, I simply take a romantic interest."

"Are you going to butt in?" demanded Madame.

"That's hard to say. Really——"

He paused.

"You'll hurt yourself if you do. Bruce and I understand each other, and he will not brook an insult to a woman."

"I agree with you there; it would be dangerous. When a white man comes out of many, many months of barbarism, he is apt to idealize the first white woman he sees. I have known adventuresses to take advantage of this masculine weakness to ingratiate themselves with such, and——"

Madame threw in an interruption.

"And I'm on; it is closed fists between you and me."

"For which I am sorry, and alarmed; Madame is no mean adversary, and if I suited myself I'd rather be open palms with her. If it were open palms, I might put Madame a friendly question as to the object of her pursuit of Mr. Clapperton's affections, since marriage—— But I forget; the skeleton in the cupboard is not a bad husband, but a bad brother."

The corner of Madame's eye glanced question, and her annoyance escaped in a petulant reproof.

"Gentlemen," with sarcastic emphasis, "usually leave skeletons buried. Anyway, my brother has paid the penalty—his bones bleach the Great Salt Caravan Route."

"Indeed! I offer my condolences. But your —er, brother, knew the risk he was taking. It is wonderful to me that Madame escaped alive out of that wild country. The Tuaregs do not like 'Christian dogs' prowling around."

"They certainly do not," Madame responded, and in her relief at his apparent acceptance of her "brother's" death, she entertained him with a story.

"THERE was one time when I thought it was by-by for sure. We had struck a pagan village on the route to Agades. The negroes were very inquisitive about my dress, and but for the interference of my brother they would have denuded me; and right there the trouble started. They made it an excuse to provoke a quarrel, that they might rob and kill us. Their wicked old chief threw us into an awful dungeon, with a promise to feed us to the crocodiles in the execution pond early next morning. But a Tuareg merchant traveling that way bravely interfered."

"To get a chance to rob you himself," Low interjected. But Madame indignantly defended the Tuareg's character.

"Indeed, you're 'way off. He was a gentleman—more so than many whites of my acquaintance," she said. "He braved his own life; for he had but three negro servants, or slaves, with him, and no weapon at all." Her eyes snapped and the color flushed her face.

"Very curious that," commented Low. "I never heard of a Tuareg who had not a muzzle-loader or sword. But I interrupt; he saved you from the crocodiles, eh?"

"Yes. It seems that the pagans live in awful fear of the Tuaregs, and this lone trader took a chance on that to demand our freedom. He even journeyed with us until we were in the country ruled by the friendly Emir of Kagos. He did more: he depleted his own store of quinine and tea."

"Tea!" mused Low. "Did it not strike you as rather strange that a Tuareg should have tea?"

"It did. But our Samaritan said he traded down to the barter stores of the whites on the Niger."

"He spoke English! What sort of looking man was he?"

"What a question! As if one saw anything of a Tuareg but his eyes. Our veiled Samaritan wore the usual head shawl, or turban, which was folded over nose and mouth to keep out the desert sands, and the rest of him was burnoose and yellow sheepskin top-boots."

"He is your hero, eh?"

Madame turned a full face and there was no doubting her sincerity.

"I never had but little sentiment in my make-up, and that little has been killed by the world—the kind of world I have bucked. But I see that sluggish execution pond, and

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the long noses of its ugly denizens; and I feel the sweat of that dungeon, and my flesh creeps yet at the touch of its foul vermin. And then I think of that Tuareg—his gentle consideration, untiring patience, and—see here, Mr. Low. Things are pretty plain between us, and you know what money means to me—y'know how it would boost me from adventuress to real lady, with the world—London, Paris, New York, and the best at that—for playground. Well, I want to say this: if it were all mine, I'd give it to help that man out of a hole; yes, I'd give it all to help a man as black as——"

"Walnut stain could make him," Low soliloquized; and Madame said, "What?" But Low was saved explanations by the coming of a tall man, walking with leisurely grace that agreed with the full, drawling voice in which he addressed them.

"Perhaps I intrude?" He peered down on Madame with grave, dreamy eyes such as men bring out of nature solitudes.

Madame drew in her claws, purring.

"As if that were possible, Bruce." She turned her piquant, mosquito-pitted face to Low, her lovely eyes saying plainly: "You see our footing; come between us if you dare." Then she rose, excusing herself on a plea of letter-writing, though Low understood her move as a direct challenge to him; for she left him free to exchange confidences with Clapperton.

"Most remarkable woman," he sighed, easing himself into her vacated deck-chair. "She doesn't bore—there's positive charm in her sympathetic understanding."

"Languished in a barbarian's dungeon," Low interjected.

"Ah, she told you that!"

"And told you?" quizzed Low; but Clapperton was not giving anything away. He continued his encomium.

"I found her encamped on a sand-bank in the Niger, holding her own with her canoemen, as cold-blooded as if she were picnicking on the Thames." Low got a quick mental picture of Madame squatting on the route of the explorer and carefully posed to impress, and his ideas of her cleverness lost nothing in Clapperton's story of their meeting and quick friendship.

"By Jove! There was a woman for you." Clapperton went on. "Why, she and her brother had dared those Tuareg devils simply to pick up a few hundred dollars in entomological specimens. It takes the world and poverty to make real men and women of us.

"There was a time when I thought that fame—but that's another story; I learned that to write standard works and be fêted by scientific societies was nothing without fortune. I learned it in the cruelest way—from the lips of the one woman who spelled Life to me. She sent me back to the solitudes, and this time I let fame go by and chased money.

"By Jove! I've got something in my cabin that'll hit this stupid old world straight between its eyes and make it dig deep down into its guarded pocket. It cost me hardship, patience, despair; but I've got it, and the world is mine."

"You have been among the Tuaregs. Didn't you meet much opposition on account of your color?" asked Low, inviting details.

"When I touched their country I donned their garb, language and customs, nor put them off until I was safely back to the Niger."

"Ah!" escaped Low.

Clapperton caught the significance.

"I see you have my secret, Mr. Low. I beg of you not to give me away to Madame. You will respect my confidence?"

"If you make a point of it, certainly."

"I do. A man must not place an unprotected lady under obligations. Now if you'll excuse me I'll go and lock my cabin on my treasure."

LOW muttered something about locking the stable after the horse was stolen, and went to the rail to watch the docking of the boat, when a black excitedly called his name from the bank. Low announced himself and the negro deftly spun a letter to deck. It was a short communication from the agent in charge, requesting Low to report to a "certain party" at the mission. But as he crossed the gang-plank he caught the flutter of a skirt around the angle of the deck-house. Madame was watching.

He walked boldly toward the trading-compound until his figure merged into the black shadow of a baobab, when he stopped, looking back.

Madame was cautiously feeling her way over the gang-plank, thence up the bank, where she turned off toward the village. Quick as thought Low slipped around some

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sheds and stood in the shadow of a hut. Madame swung confidently into view, walking across the open market-place, until a negro emerged from a hut and openly accosted her. She exhibited no surprise, but turned with the black into the hut, a mat door closing on them. Low boldly approached the hanging mat and spied between its reeds. A hurricane-lantern on a low native stool threw its yellow light over the lower limbs of a tall white, and full into the flat, brutal face of a negro who squatted on his haunches on the clay floor, his animal eyes rolled upward on Madame's face. Madame was speaking, or pleading.

"It's like stealing milk from a baby, Con."

"All the easier for you," the white chuckled.

"All the meaner," she responded, and he took her up roughly.

"What's that to you? See here, Chic, no tricks, or——" His hand shot for her white wrist, tightening on it till she cried out in pain. He dropped the wrist with a growl.

"Then don't fool. Get to business. How is the stuff packed?"

"In two hardtack cans, medium size," she answered reluctantly, then suddenly fell to pleading again.

"Oh, Con, you can't imagine the hardships he suffered for it, and what it means to him. If—if we succeed, he goes down and out: it's his last throw. It will break his heart. There's a story behind it—a girl," she whimpered. His answer was a snarl.

"You're in thick, eh? I knew you'd make good with him; but the question is: is he making good with you? See here, Chic: I won't trust you. Listen. I'm going to send Sabbo down with you as your servant. I'd travel with you myself, if it were not a company steamer. I'm too well known to them. I'll take the government steamer, which'll beat you to Burutu by several hours. There Sabbo and I will do the trick, and all you have to do is to keep the jay amused. Now, get back to the boat before that fellow Low smells your absence. Expect Sabbo in an hour. He'll have his goods packed in two hardtack cans, medium size. Beat it, Chic."

Low ducked quickly across the square, straight to the corrugated-iron mission at the end of the village. As he climbed the veranda a woman rose from a cane seat, addressing him.

"Mr. Low?"

"Yes, Lady Wilson," he responded, and she at once led the way inside.

The moment he saw her face in the light he warmed to its girlish openness; he was not the hired agent of a titled woman, but a man throwing his protection around a girl in trouble. She spoke the instant he closed the door.

"Mr. Clapperton is aboard the boat you came by?" she said; and followed up with eager inquiry, "Is he well—unhurt?"

Her lips parted anxiously on his answer, and relief sprang into her face at his reassurance. Veiled emotion throbbed in her next words.

"I feared. There is a wicked plot, as you must have guessed from your instructions. Tell me quickly—has Mr. Clapperton suffered any loss?"

"Of what, my lady?"

"What he went for—something of value, if the conspiracy which I accidentally discovered means anything. But perhaps he was disappointed in his hopes?"

Low briefly reviewed the story, watching her varying emotion, the soft light in her violet-flecked eyes as he related the incident of the Veiled Samaritan, their concern for the explorer's valuables and then her growing surprise at his warm friendship with Madame, which eventually found expression in a gasp of incredulity.

"Can Bruce Clapperton respect that sort of woman?"

Low unconsciously found himself defending the explorer.

"Your ladyship does not perhaps understand the situation. Mr. Clapperton seems to have a grudge against women who walk the paths of respectability." She started; a flush crept over her pink English face and her slender fingers locked and unlocked nervously. He went on, "Then, too, he comes out of barbarism, and happens on Madame Joulaud——"

Her ladyship interjected a comment.

"She was Janet Lang when she was my maid."

"—In a most romantic situation," Low continued. "Madame laid herself out to be entertaining."

"The chit certainly can be that, as I learned to my cost. I trusted her implicitly. I would have lost my jewels

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through my confidence if the rascal she worked with had not deposited them with an Algerian Jew at Lagos for three hundred pounds. We discovered that he used the money to outfit a journey to Sokoto. I instantly sent an aerogram to the agent-general of your company, asking that some one be detailed to warn Mr. Clapperton; which, according to your story, you apparently have not done."

"Mr. Clapperton would not have listened to anything against Madame. But if your ladyship will step aboard with me we can expose her and save him."

"Oh, no!" She clutched his sleeve in wild alarm. "He must never, never know that I am concerned, or that I am in Nigeria," she insisted, the color mantling into her cheeks. "I am putting my honor in your hands, Mr. Low. You drop nothing, they say, and I am trusting you. But if he will not hear a word against the woman, you have another course. Work on her feeling for Mr. Clapperton; reveal to her the identity of her Veiled Samaritan."

"Ah!" cried Low regretfully, "that is what I can not do. I am under promise to Mr. Clapperton to guard his secret—a quixotic notion of his not to place a lady under open obligation."

"But in a case like this——"

"I gave my promise. But fear nothing; I have the key to the conspiracy, and shall have that rascal Sabbo under observation all the way to Burutu. Do you stay on here, my lady?"

"Oh, no! I can not. I—I shall be too anxious about the outcome," she admitted, with a blush that told its own story. Then she poured out the many fears that beset her. "If there were real police service here I'd have the plotters arrested; but that would expose me. I am blocked in every course. But you must hurry back to your steamer, Mr. Low. It would be dreadful to leave Mr. Clapperton at the mercy of that brute Sabbo. Yet, stay—one moment! Tell me, do you think Mr. Clapperton can really care anything for that adventuress?"

"Every man nurses an ideal, either consciously or subconsciously," answered Low thoughtfully. "If the years pass without his meeting that ideal he becomes disheartened. Madame offers entertaining companionship, sympathetic interest, and—she is the first woman after a year of barbarism."

"Yes," in a faltering half-sob. "I think I understand, Mr. Low. We women buy our knowledge dearly sometimes. Good night."

As he passed around the corner of the compound Low was jolted wide-awake by the jangle of tin cans; turning, he saw a hulking negro swinging down to the steamer with two biscuit-tins in his hand, lustily bawling the Song of the Oil Rivers. Low fell behind ten paces.

The black took the gang-plank in two strides. Madame was at the rail, close by Clapperton, watching the play of the happy wood-carriers, her face an open book in the light in which they worked. She saw the negro with a start of fear, drawing back as he accosted her with impudent assurance.

"I'se Sabbo," he said, assuming the English and manners of a bushboy. "I'se come to be your boy; I savvy make beds an' 'most eberyting."

She clawed the rail, but her wits worked quickly; turning to Clapperton, she covered the incident.

"Africa is surely the land of the Arabian Nights; here the servant chooses his master or mistress. They evidently market us off amongst themselves, for it is only a few minutes ago that my boy deserted me."

"The ways of the African are inscrutable," Clapperton laughed, "but his ingenuity is beyond doubt. See his improvised steamer-trunks."

Madame glanced at the biscuit-tins and shuddered.

He was solicitous at once, cautioning her against night chills, whilst he drew her wrap about her shoulders and led her to the cabins. She looked over her shoulder and shuddered again. The negro was stalking them.

II

IF IT had been futile to attempt to insinuate doubt of Madame's character into the explorer's ears before Lokoja, it was most absolutely so after. Their two deck-chairs were constantly side by side under the forward awning, and the burr of his voice rose above her modulated syllables as he entertained her with his adventures whilst the stern-wheeler threshed the Niger into foam. Madame said little; she seemed content to listen and dream.

Plainly she was falling deeper and deeper under his strange charm, and Low soon found himself intensely interested in a

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psychological problem. Which force would triumph over Madame—the hypnotism of Clapperton, or fear of her brute "brother"? She seemed to have forgotten the latter, though she got a rude reminder a day out from Lokoja, when the government boat throbbed by and a man wearing an enormous helmet, which transformed his appearance, stood sinister and threatening at the stern. There was also a glimpse of a woman's skirt under the port awning; but only Low guessed her identity. Madame's eyes were all for the first figure; and across their dark depths chased fear, remorse, and haunted horror.

Meanwhile Sabbo was busy cultivating the acquaintance of Clapperton's boy, a simple slave whom the explorer had brought out of Sokoto and who was too "bushy" for the wily Sabbo. Low kept the latter under closest surveillance, and was rewarded on the eve of Burutu. Sabbo eliminated himself between cheese and dessert at dinner that night, and a nervousness in Madame's manner evidenced a guilty consciousness of something toward. Low found himself profoundly interested. Would Madame see the explorer despoiled and ruined, or would her better self triumph in self-sacrifice? But he did not forget Lady Wilson's trust; his every sense was on the alert. Thus it was he heard a sound of cans knocking together. Glancing through the cabin port, he saw Sabbo stealing aft to the crew's quarters with two biscuit-tins. The exchange was accomplished.

Restraining an impulse to rush out and nab the rogue in the act, he waited until cigars. Then Madame went to her deck-chair, expecting Clapperton to follow shortly. Low leaned across the cloth.

"Mr. Clapperton, I am going to butt in on your personal concerns. I am not free at this moment to explain my interest, but if you will take me to your cabin I will give you a very unpleasant surprise. You left your cabin unlocked?"

The explorer stared. Low dropped his voice to an earnest whisper.

"Keep still—don't cry out; but you are robbed."

Clapperton was suddenly cool—too cool. He rose, speaking normally.

"Let's go."

He preceded Low to his cabin, closing the door, where one glance at two biscuit-tins reassured him. He turned on Low for explanations; the latter said two words.

"Examine them!" And he turned his back.

A choked cry caused him to turn swiftly. Clapperton was on his knees beside the tins, staring with drawn and chalky face at a mass of rags, paper and dirt.

Low helped him to his feet, eased his tottering frame to a chair and told as much of the story as he could without implicating Madame. Clapperton sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"My God, man, why do we stand here? Do you know that those tins contain——"

"King Solomon's mines in royalties, you once told me," Low interjected, catching the explorer's arm and holding him back.

"Wait; your treasure can not get off this boat before we touch Burutu. Listen to my scheme. This negro will return to his attendance on Madame as quickly as possible, to allay suspicion. You go to Madame and see that the black is kept busy. Meanwhile I'll take these tins to his quarters and bring yours back. Then I'll join you, and we'll contrive to keep Sabbo engaged until we dock, where he will be in too great a hurry to get away with the goods to stop and make examinations. It will be an excellent finish."

"Very well, Mr. Low. You are the accredited agent of the company and I trust you, though I shall expect an explanation of your care of my interest at the right time. Meanwhile I am your debtor. I will rejoin Madame Joulaud. I only ask you to come as quickly as you can and end my suspense. Come! Let's see if the rascal is with his mistress. Not a word to her that her servant nearly caused my ruin; it would distress her terribly. Come," he said, grabbing a shotgun and oiling-cloth, the purpose of which was evident when they reached Madame.

Sabbo was already there, his ebony homeliness full of guile. With Madame's gracious permission Clapperton gave him the gun to clean, ordering him into the bows, where he could see him and converse with Madame without being overheard by the black.

Low ducked away to the lower deck, to the aft quarters, where he quickly unearthed the two precious tins from under Sabbo's bunk, and as quickly made the exchange. Returning to the forward awnings, he was arrested by the throb in Madame's voice.

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"Wait a moment; let me think. I have to say that which comes hard. Oh, it breaks my heart; but it has to be said. I'm not what you think me. I am an adventuress."

"And I am an adventurer," he pleasantly interjected. But she harshly disowned the connection.

"You won't understand. I have done things—wicked things."

"I can't believe that. Indiscreet you may have been, but not wicked."

"Oh, please don't interrupt; don't make it harder for me than it is," she gulped. "I have lived a beautiful dream since our meeting on the upper Niger. But it ends now; my husband is waiting for me. That is all. It is enough, isn't it?" she added with brave attempt at humor.

A tense silence followed; the two heads moved a little apart, and the negro in the bows rose up, his enormous silhouette cut against the lights of Burutu as he stood intently watching the shore. At last Clapperton spoke. His voice carried the weight of a bitter disenchantment.

"How we men fool ourselves! How ready we are to believe a woman is what we dream she is! This is the second time I have courted disaster, though in the other case she was your very opposite—a pink-and-white patrician lady, correct in all things except soul. I thought she had even that, and pegged all my idealisms on it. But I was poor, and she listened to her family," he ended bitterly.

Madame started to say something, but collapsed quickly into labored breathing; a second time she half spoke, and again checked herself. Whatever it was, it was very hard to say.

Low woke to the fact that he was eavesdropping, and started forward; when she suddenly flung up her head, and her voice, cold, clear, emotionless, arrested Low with its determination.

"Oh, I will tell you. I will not be silent when your happiness is involved. I have met but two men who ever moved me, woke what good there was left in me; and one was my Veiled Samaritan, the other is yourself. But it is so hard to say what I have to say to you. I know her—I know Lady Wilson. *Please* don't jump; hear me out. I entered her service at Las Palmas. My husband made me. Her companion left her there, frightened at the fever reputation of the Gold Coast, whither her ladyship was accompanying her father, the new Governor. She had jewels which my husband wanted to outfit an expedition.

"It was my business to gain her ladyship's confidence. The poor girl was alone, and eager to confide her unhappiness to sympathetic ears. She showed me a photo. It was yours. She told me that she had let happiness pass her by, and—— What's that?" she cried, leaping to her feet, straining eyes at a dark object that specked out of mangroves and crept along with the stern-wheeler.

A NOTE of fear in her cry and the tense strain of her attitude told Low that the dark object was expected to play a part in the theft of Clapperton's treasure, and any doubt was quickly dispersed by Sabbo, who brought Clapperton the gun and quickly disappeared aft. Low took two steps to the explorer, whispering, "All right." Then he jumped to the bridge and trained a small searchlight on the creeping shape. In the light tunnel was sharply defined a canoe paddled by six naked blacks, and over the stern gunwale showed a large helmet.

One glance at Madame established the identity of the wearer of that helmet. Her fingers were locked in agony; her eyes were wild, and her soul squirmed under the torture of the two desperate choices—to warn Clapperton and save him his treasure, or keep silence and save her husband and herself. She had little time to make the decision; in a few minutes they would be fast alongside the government steamer; the crew were getting out the buffer-mats. It wanted only a straw to sway Madame's decision, and Clapperton innocently furnished the straw. Mistaking her emotion for remorse, he sought to ease her conscience.

"You must not take it like that; you can congratulate yourself on playing the game in the end. I do not blame you for snatching at the dream, even if it were likely to hurt me; and anyway, I am under deepest obligations to you. Whatever happens I shall always have a conviction of at least two true women. I will think only of what you might have been if fortune had not played so cruelly with you; and before we part I must confess to a little secret of my own—must confess my identity with what you call your Veiled Samaritan."

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"*You?*" she gasped. "You?"

Her cry was lost in the shouting of captains and the crunching of the two steamers; and ere she had recovered, Sabbo stood before her, a biscuit-can in either hand, repeating with glibness a prepared speech.

"I done leave you, missy. I done go to my mammy what live in village near here."

Madame's right hand clutched the rail for support; her left went out unconsciously toward the tins. She tried to speak, but the words died in a choked gurgle in her throat. Her eyes were big with terror as they saw the negro climb over the rail to the government steamer and thence to dock.

Clapperton had at first made a move to aid her, but her behavior stayed him. He whirled on Low.

"My God! She is in on the steal—she knows!"

Madame had sense for nothing but the glint of two tins traversing the wharf toward an oncoming canoe. Suddenly she squealed like a frightened hare and threw a pointing hand at the disappearing negro, crying warning to Clapperton.

"Quick! he has your valuables—your valuables! Oh, for God's sake, be quick!"

She buried her face in her hands, her shoulders convulsing. An expression of deep compassion swept Clapperton's features; he stepped toward her. Madame's cry had drawn women from the cabins of the government boat. Clapperton found himself staring into the patrician features of Lady Wilson. The next moment he had vaulted the rails.

Low caught a murmur of mingling voices, then found himself solacing Madame with the interrupted explanations.

"Why do you cry so? It is all right as far as Mr. Clapperton's valuables are concerned; your—er—brother is getting two cans of rags, paper and dirt. Are you afraid of him? He'll never know you squealed. Anyway, it will be a long time before he dares to show his face in these parts, and I think Lady Wilson will help you to something more in line with your brilliancy—she said something about recommending you to her father for a secretaryship. Come! Let's see how Mr. Clapperton is making it with her ladyship. Come! Let me take your arm; and believe me, you are among friends."

She suffered him to draw her aboard the government boat, where they found an old romance rebudding. Clapperton turned a radiant face and offered Low his hand, speaking from his heart.

"Lady Wilson has been telling me how much I am indebted to you. Some explanations are due you. It seems you are all cognizant of our little romance and my disappointment in the Las Palmas gardens," he said with a smile that included Madame.

"You know my fortuneless crime. The scholarly world had sat agape at my book on the Tuaregs—the Veiled Men of the Desert; but the scholarly world is in a minority. Why not hit the bourgeois majority in its thrifty pocket by moving pictures of the same? Such is the prize in my biscuit-tins—the life and color of those desert nomads in reels of films. Emirs, merchants, robbers; sheepskin tent and camel caravan; peaceful well-drawers and ruffian raiders; the lone hunter with assegais hunting the Nubian lion; the Hour of Prayer; the surging crowds of Ramazan; the clash of arms, all gotten by patience—night-long vigils in topmost branch of baobab or palm, and always the fear of discovery.

"I had told them the machine was a Turkish prayer-wheel, of which they had heard, and so gained a very holy reputation. It was in this character that I came upon Madame and her—er—escort in a distressing situation. Well, we've all had quite an adventure," he smiled all around, his glance resting a moment on Madame, to whom he tossed comfort. "But we gain by it; we come out with renewed faith in women and men with souls, eh?"

Madame murmured a faltering "Yes," but Clapperton was already looking into a pair of violet-flecked eyes, as he had looked into them in the brief hour of the romance of the Las Palmas gardens.

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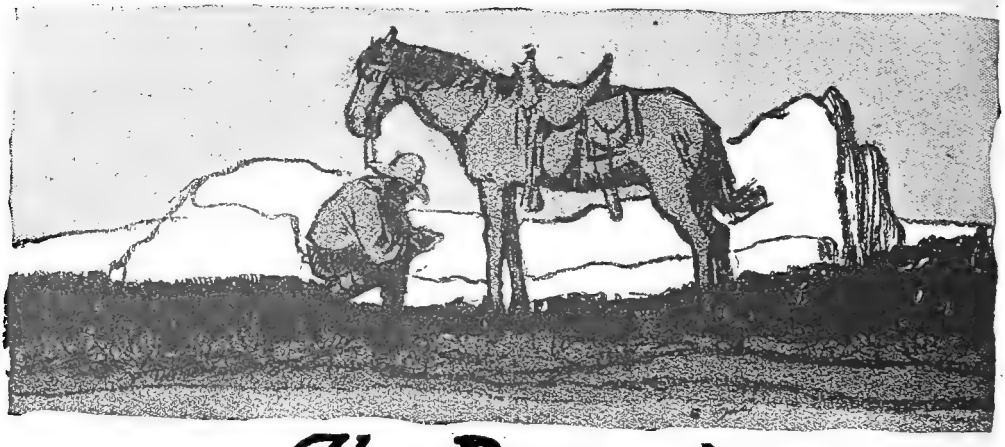

The Reward

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "The Island of the Dead," "The Greenstone Mask."

I

"TWENTY thousand fish, and easy money! I tell you it's a cinch, Jeth. I've got the whole thing doped out. Listen——"

"Curly" Ames, wax-faced, dissipated by-product of the city, laid his cigarette-stained fingers earnestly on the knee of the big man beside him and looked swiftly about with shifty eyes. Around the speaker was a scattered ring of the cardboard mouthpieces of a cheap brand of cigarettes. He withdrew his hand, lit a fresh tube and inhaled it eagerly.

The two were alone on a bald knob of decomposing granite that stood out from the verdant mountain-side like a rock in mid-ocean. They were secure from watchers or listeners. The deer-trail by which they had come was the only path through the dense brush, and its faint opening lay directly under their vision. About them brooded the silent heat of noon, broken only by the shrill chirping of the cicadas. Above reared the spurs of the Sierra, lifting up to solitudes of snow. Below, the foothills, set with pine, buckeye and madrono, with a tangle of manzanita, scrub-oak and chamisal, sloped, with pocket valleys here and there, down to the plains, four thousand feet beneath, quivering in a milky haze.

"I'm hep to the whole thing, Jeth. It's the first big chance, and the last. Two hundred men have been working at the mine since they made the strike last month. The payroll's way over twenty thou'. It's coming up Wells Fargo on the stage from Bluemount to Argentina this afternoon. This is the twenty-ninth. Wells Fargo closes out the route on the first, account the parcels-post putting business on the blink. Next month the mine pays off in check-warrants. I got the whole lay-out at the ranch. The old man's foreman of one of the drill-gangs, an' he giv' out the whole thing last night after supper."

Jethroe grunted.

"I don't see where the cinch comes in," he said.

"Say—listen to me a minute. What's easier than holdin' up the stage at Hayes Crossing? There ain't a soul 'round there. We can make our getaway across the Big Arroyo over the state line, like I told you. Twenty thousand for half an hour's work. I thought you said you wanted to get away from here?" he urged. "Here's your chance to do it—with a wad. What's eating you? Has your conscience got corns on it?"

"See here, Curly," said the big man, leaning on his forearm as he talked. "I don't know what you done back there in the city, but you ain't hidin' out here at your uncle's ranch—where you don't seem partickler welcome for all I hear—for the fun of it. I don't giv' a whoop what it was, but I'll

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bet it wasn't straight. You're a crook—and I ain't—yet."

"Aw, crook nothin'. Say, whose money is this? A corporation's. They won't miss it. Their shares went plumb out of sight when they hit the vein. Of course if you're afraid," he sneered, "then——"

"Don't you worry none about that end of it. But it ain't so easy. Twenty thousand sounds all right, but twenty years in the penitentiary don't listen so good. You're playin' safe. I do the job an' pull the chestnuts out of the fire while you watch me, ready to scoot if I get burned."

"Who showed you the chestnuts? Aw, I ain't no good at the rough stuff, Jeth, an' I know it. I ain't got the nerve. It's my dope against your work. That's fair, ain't it? An' the getaway's easy."

"Getaway!" answered Jethroe. "That ain't no way to handle a job like this. What we want to do is to stick around, join the posse mebbe. Fix up an alibi. Lay low till the affair dies down or they arrest some other chap for it."

"You're no boob, Jeth! Will you do it?"

"Are you dead sure about your fac's? If I stick up that stage an' there's nothin' doin', it ain't goin' to be healthy for you."

"Of course I'm sure. They got to pay the men off, ain't they? It's the last stage trip before the first of the month, ain't it? What's your dope about the alibi?"

"You cut along now back to the ranch for your dinner. Tell 'em you're comin' over to see me at my prospect. You won't show in the actual work at all. Then, if they should get a bug it's me, you can swear you were with me all the afternoon."

"That's some chatter. Then there ain't nothing you want me to help with on the job?"

"Nothin'. I'll go it alone. After you've had the grub you dig out as if you was goin' over to my prospect hole, work aroun' an' meet me on the ridge of Lone Mountain. We'll set 'em a plain trail to the Little Coyote. Then we'll blind it an' work back to my prospect, hide the swag and go down to camp about dark, natural, ready to act surprised at the news."

"Some scheme, Jeth! You're on."

Jethroe, handsome in a swarthy, saturnine way, rose to his feet and stretched himself.

"Off you go, Curly. I'll come along later. And, see here, my son, you play this straight. If we're pinched an' you squeal——"

"Aw, nix on that, Jeth. We ain't goin' to get pinched. I'm on the level. We'll slip this over and get back to the Coast with a stake. Wait till we hit Frisco. We'll——"

"You'll do what I tell you. You'll move when I say so, d'you hear? Now you scatter."

"Curly," anaemic, debased by the ways of the underworld, incongruous in his flashy city clothes, got up and walked furtively to the edge of the skirting brush. There he paused to light another cigarette—Jethroe watching him contemptuously—before he dived like a rat into the narrow trail.

II

THE rough cabin of Jethroe was set amid a cluster of oaks and sycamores in one of the little pocket valleys on the shoulder of the mountain range. A patch of garden showed by the stream that ran beneath the rank willows, and a straggling orchard gave evidence of abortive attempts at industry.

In the larger of the two rooms of the shack a child of five was playing with a doll at the table, on which was a pickle jar of purple lupines and a basket of sewing. Board shelves hung by the stove, holding a scanty supply of dishes. A sunbonnet, above a woman's black silk scarf, swung from a nail beside them. On the opposite wall was a cheap mirror. Three chairs completed the furnishings.

"Muvver," called the youngster. "Marfa's got no clothes. I want to make her a new jess. Muvver!"

The door of the inner room of the shack opened and a woman entered. She was hardly more than a girl: tall, lithe, gray-eyed beneath clearly marked brows; brown hair smoothly braided; a scarlet, wide but resolute mouth under a short, straight nose. Her simple gown, rewashed until the pattern was a faded enigma, displayed a supple, rounded figure.

"I'll find you something for Dolly presently, honey-bunch," she said, sitting at the table and gathering the child into her lap. "Listen while mother tells you something. How'd you like to go way back home with mother—back to gran'ma and gran'pa?"

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"Home to gran'ma? Could I have a dog —a little white dog of my own?"

"Yes, dear, yes."

The woman put down the letter she was holding and sat with tear-wet eyes, looking through the open door.

The child reached up and stroked her cheek.

"Soon, muvver?"

"I hope so, dear."

She picked up the letter and read its closing sentences again.

If you come home, your mother and I will gladly welcome you and the little one, but not Jim Jethroe. He has turned out as we all thought. I wish we could send you the money, but times are hard.

Always your loving dad,
JOHN PICKETT.

The green wall of the Sierra faded, and level fields, bordered by elm and walnut above the elbow-fencing, took its place. A long, low farm house, smoke rising from the chimneys, its windows hidden behind tall hollyhocks, its walls draped with clustering vines, claimed her vision.

"Will faver go too, muvver?"

"I don't know, dear. I——"

A footstep crunched outside. The woman hid the letter swiftly in her bosom as the bulk of Jethroe filled the doorway.

"Grub ready?" he asked.

"I didn't know you were coming home, Jim. You don't, usually, at noon. There's some tea and a bit of bread and butter. We——"

"Tea! A fine home you keep," he said roughly. "Come here, kid."

The child had retreated to the doorway where she stood timidly.

"Come here, I tell yer. Well trained, ain't she?"

"Go to your father, Margy."

The child obeyed hesitatingly.

"I want my dolly," she said.

"You do, do yer?" replied Jethroe, holding the plaything above his head. "Well, come and get it."

He kept it from the child's reach tantalizingly, till she started to whimper.

"Stow that," he threatened.

"I want my dolly," she cried, beating with her little fists upon his knees.

"Don't tease the child, Jim. It's the only plaything she's got."

"My fault, I suppose. My fault there's nothin' for me to eat when I come home. A nice, welcome, domestic picture, ain't it?"

He threw the doll into a corner and the child ran to it, sobbing.

"You get into the bedroom, both of ye," he ordered. "I've got something I want to do. Beat it now."

He banged the inner door after them, then shut the outer one and glanced out of the window. Going to the shelves he took down a bottle and poured himself half a cupful of whisky. From the drawer of the table he took a holstered revolver which he attached to his belt. Another gun already swung at his right hip. He rummaged through the work-basket, tossing out the contents and hesitating over a black stocking.

Then he took another drink and replaced the bottle, noting the black scarf as he did so. He took it from the nail and examined it, cast a second look through the window and sat down at the table where he started to cut at the scarf with a pair of scissors.

Rising and looking out once more at the clearing, he went to the mirror where he tried the effect of his work against his face. He had made a rough mask, through which his eyes gleamed as he tried the length of the tieing ends behind his head.

At the sound of the inner door opening he wheeled abruptly.

His wife stood by the door, one arm behind her, closing it. Her face was pale, her breathing hurried.

"Jim," she gasped, "what's that for?"

"I told you to keep out of here," he said.

"I came in to get my sewing. Oh, Jim, Jim, you're not going to——"

"You attend to your own affairs, and keep your mouth and eyes shut."

"It *is* my affair," she retorted. "Mine for my own sake and that of the child."

She went close to him, placing one hand on his forearm and grasping at the scarf with the other

"You keep away," he threatened," crushing the mask into his hip pocket. "Keep away, I tell you."

"I won't," she cried, clinging to him. "I've stood by you for six years. I ran away from home for you. You've broken every promise you ever made to me. You've never given me a home, you've been shiftless—and I've never complained. But you shall not make a criminal out of the father of my child."

He thrust her off.

"Cut the dime-novel stuff," he said.

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"What are you going to do about it?" he jeered as she staggered back.

"I'm going to do my best," she answered, going swiftly to the door and standing there with her arms across from wall to wall. "I'm willing to put up with anything, Jim, if you'll give up whatever mad scheme you have, but if you don't——"

"What then?"

He strode to the door and stood before her, his head lowered to the level of her's, his jaw outthrust, his eyes threatening.

"I'll see that the law stops you from breaking it. I'll warn—ah!"

He seized her by the wrists and forced her roughly to her knees. As she clutched at his legs, he opened the door and swung back fiercely, striking her heavily on the head.

"You would have it, would you?" he said as she fell senseless to the floor.

He pushed her limp form inside the threshold with his foot, slammed the door and went swiftly to the little barn where he flung saddle and saddle-bags on his horse and spurred the rearing beast furiously along the little stream.

III

SANDY BOURKE, cowboy-at-large—nicknamed on account of his grit, not the color of his hair, which was brown—rode down the woodland trail with one leg across the horn of his saddle, rolling a cigarette and singing in sheer exuberance of spirits.

"Said the Gila monster to the horn-ed toad,
Shift yore freight to the side of the road;
This ter-ri-to-ry b'longs to me,
An' I don't take dust from you, sir-ree.

"Hold up, you old pie-eater, you've plumb spiled the cigareet. Thirsty, are you—"as his horse stretched its neck suddenly and snuffed with open nostrils—"we'll find a li'l ol' stream soon, an' I reckon I'll take a drink with you——

"For the trail is long an' my throat is dry,
An' I've got no use for al-ka-li.

"So trot along li'l hawss."

He pinched his cigarette deftly and lighted it. Sandy liked to talk to himself, to his horse, to anybody or thing that showed signs of being companionable. He was on his way from the mining camp of Argentina to Bluemount, thence to the plains where a job on the ranch of an old employer was awaiting him. His overnight stay at Argentina had been an expensive one. The miners had despoiled the cowman at poker, and of his last pay-check he had but thirty dollars, vouchsafed to him by fortune—who liked Sandy—in the consolation pot.

The loss of his money bothered him little. The beating of his full hand by four eights—drawn to a pair—still rankled, but only as a matter to be straightened out at some future date.

"I sure misjudged that hand," he soliloquized. "Some day, mebbe, I'll set in with that brushfaced ol' baldhead again an'——"

"Hello," he said as the trail dipped suddenly to a stream, sparkling merrily and swiftly along. "Hello! Look here li'l gel, you mustn't do that. Me an' my hawss want a drink. You'll get the water all salty."

Margy Jethroe, the denuded doll clutched in one hand, tears running down her puckered face, looked up from across the stream.

"Want to get acrost? Here, I'll come and get you. You-all can ride over on Pete here, can't she Pete?"

"My muvver's a deader," sobbed Margy. "She's got her eyes all shut an' she—she won't speak—or—or—nuffin."

"Eh, what's that? Oh, come, I reckon she ain't dead. Where is she? See here, we'll go and find her. Put yore li'l foot on mine an' give me yore hand. Hang on to Dolly."

He swung her easily up in front of him astride the saddle horn.

"There, li'l lady. Now show me where mother is," he said, comforting her as the child pointed up the trail.

THE door of the shack was open and Jethroe's wife lay as she had fallen. Sandy dropped the reins over his horse's head, dismounted and quickly entered.

"You go get some water, honey," he commanded. "That's right!" as the child took a dipper and ran out of the door.

His eyes spied the bottle, and, smelling it, he forced a little of the whisky between the unconscious woman's lips. She stirred and moaned as Margy brought the water. Sandy knelt on the floor and raised her head, exclaiming as he noticed a dark bruise on her temple.

"Who did this?" he asked the child.

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"Why, look at them li'l wrists, all chafed up. Who was it?"

Alice Jethroe opened her eyes and looked blankly about her. She saw her swollen wrists and folded them swiftly against her gown.

"There," said Sandy, "you're all right again. Take it easy now. Yo're li'l gel fetched me in."

"I—I was dizzy and fell. I'm better now. Thank you."

Sandy assisted her to rise, looking at her wrists as he helped her. She flushed under his gaze and, releasing her hands, sat down at the table.

"Faver did it," said Margy.

"Hush, honey."

"Well he did, too. I heard him scoldin' you an' then there was a bump an' he rode away an', an' I was frighted, I was—an' I come out of the room an' muvver was on the floor—so I runned out an' found him."

The woman, in some reaction of giddiness, had sunk her face between her arms on the table.

"He hurted me too, yestiddy," went on Margy, rolling up her sleeve from her dimpled arm and gravely displaying a bruise.

Alice raised her head and called the child to her.

"Hush, honey," she said. "Hush!"

Sanders stood pinching the brim of his hat.

"Yore husban' 'm?" he said.

"Yes. He's not himself lately. He's——"

She glanced at the bottle.

Sandy nodded.

"I see," he said. "Bad medicine, that."

"We had words. We—I——"

Suddenly she rose to her feet.

"I'm done with him!" she cried passionately. "Done with him from now on. He's bad at heart. He's always been shiftless and he's got worse. Now he's going to——"

She checked herself hurriedly, took the letter from her bosom and handed it to Sandy.

It was only a short note, but it told between the lines the story of a wilful girl paying the penalty of an ill-chosen romance.

"Thinkin' of leavin' him 'm?" asked Sandy. "My name's Bourke," he went on, as the woman gathered the child in her arms. "I'm kind of shif'less myself, but I ain't strong on hurtin' wimmin'. I've got a sister lives nigh yore folks back there in Ioway—" he handed back the letter—"much about yore age an' size; got a li'l kiddie too. Mrs. Renton, her name is. Mebbe you know her? Or you may meet up with her some time when you get there. Ef there's anything I can do——"

He ended lamely. Sandy's heart was a soft one.

"Wimmin in trouble," he would say, "affect me like peeled onions—an' Christmas trees. Make you feel you-all want to play the part of a sniffy Santa Claus, an' never know how to go about it."

He held out his hand.

"I'm going on down to the Circle-Bar Ranch, Hooper County. You can get me there any time till after Fall. I'd be downright glad to help out if I could."

The woman put her own hand in his.

"I shouldn't have told you my troubles," she said, "but you looked friendly—and—I——"

"Sure!" said Sandy. "It's all right."

Margy created a diversion by dragging a spray of lupine from the jar.

"'S for you," she announced. "I like you. So does Dolly."

"Well, that's fine," declared Sandy. "We'll put the li'l ol' blossom in my hatband. I'll have to be movin' on. Circle-Bar, Hooper County, Sandy Bourke, 'm. There ain't nothin' I can do further?"

"There's nothing," she said smiling, "except for me to thank you again."

"Don't mention it 'm," replied Sandy.

A moment later he had swung on his horse and was cantering through the little valley, the woman and child watching him till he struck the outward trail.

IV

JETHROE rode out of the willows into the stage-road where it led into the ford at Hayes Crossing on the Big Coyote. He urged his horse to the water and splashed through the girth-high stream to the opposite shore where he turned from the highway into a clump of trees, deep in undergrowth.

There he tethered the animal to a sapling, put his guns in the breast of his shirt and waded back through the water, stopping an instant in midstream to look and listen intently. Back at the willows he kept under the overhanging boughs, waist-deep in the stream, and arranged the long branches of

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the willows to make a curtain from which he peered out, in wait for the stage.

Fifteen minutes later a cloud of dust showed a mile away, where Stone Cañyon debouched on to the Big Coyote. It had been a hot and tiresome climb for the occupants of the stage, and, as the horses swung the light buckboard into the level pitch beside the creek where a light breeze funneled down the draw, there was a general relaxation, and a tendency to conversation that had languished hours ago, was reborn.

"Reckon I'll let the stock sluice out their mouths at the crossing," said the driver to his seat-mate, the Wells-Fargo agent, a taciturn individual whose disposition was not sweetened by the knowledge that this was the last trip of a soft job that had lasted fourteen years.

"Sure is it a goot idea, drifer," chimed in the male passenger from the back seat, a notions drummer making his bi-monthly trip. "I haf a flask which it is too hot to drink yet. Maybe the water is cold. Yes?"

The other passenger, the shrewish wife of an Argentina miner, who supplemented his earnings by running a boarding-house—where her doughnuts were known as "donots" to the initiates—looked austerely at the fat little Jew and shrank away farther from his side.

"Hot, aind it?" he said amiably and unabashed. "Sure this breeze is fine."

Half-way across the Big Coyote the stage driver halted his team while they rinsed out their mouths. The three men tempered the heat of the drummer's whisky with the cold mountain water, but the driver and the agent refused his cigars with a promptitude that evidenced foreknowledge of the brand. The agent filled his pipe and tried to light it as the stage started slowly shorewards, the horses moving reluctantly, loath to leave the pleasant laving of the water.

"Dern thet wind," complained the agent as his third match failed him. "Hold 'em up a minute, Jerry, will you?"

He set his sawed-off shotgun between his knees, made a windshield of his cupped hands and drew lustily at his pipe-stem.

While his eyes watched the wavering flame a figure stepped out of the willows, wading waist-deep in the swirling water. Beneath a slouch hat, pulled well down, a black mask hung far below the chin. Gloves gauntleted at the wrists concealed the hands which held two blued revolvers of heavy caliber. Dark eyes flashed ominously through the slits in the mask, a deep voice, muffled and disguised behind the cloth, spoke with purpose.

"HANDS up! All of you—up with 'em! You driver, stick up one hand and hold your stock with the other—and hold 'em quiet. Up!"

The four obeyed orders with alacrity, the driver with an aloofness, as if the affair were none of his business, and the agent—whom the challenge had startled into dropping his pipe, which bounced from the floor of the rig into the stream—with an air of having rather expected something of the sort. He glanced ruefully at the bowl of his pet pipe bobbing away in the ripples, but said nothing.

The masked man came closer to the side of the stage, reached forward and took the shotgun from between the agent's knees with his left hand, the right still menacing with the revolver. He tossed the gun into the water.

"Get down—backwards," he ordered. "Quick!"

The agent obeyed, standing face to the rig, the water reaching to his belt.

"Now you—" the speaker indicated the drummer—"get out and come 'round here. Hurry! Keep your hands up. You, marm, can hold on the top curtains ef you're tired. Are you goin' to get out?"

"You ruin my shoes with this business," said the little drummer, hesitating on the step. "Batent leather, und new!"

"I'll ruin your carcass in a second. 'Round here on this side. Get out that box from under the seat. Never mind the mail. That's the one. Now then, put it on your shoulder, sonny, and wade across with it. Don't drop it or I'll make you dive for it. Hurry," he threatened, and the protesting drummer, shouldering the sealed and locked box, marked Wells-Fargo, struggled over the shifting boulders of the creek-bed, the water lapping high above his hips.

"Set it down and come back—with your hands up—quick!" commanded Jethroe who had meanwhile relieved the agent of a pistol from his back pocket.

"I'll keep this, partner," he said. "I might need it."

The drummer came up, shivering from the icy water, and still grumbling that his shoes were spoiled and his watch ruined.

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"You quit your whining or I'll take your watch from you and your clothes too," said Jethroe. "Stay where you are—" as the drummer started to climb back into the stage— "pull out on the bank, driver—that'll do. These gents'll walk. It'll warm 'em. You drive on and don't look back. None of you."

"Whoopee!" he suddenly shouted and fired at the sand back of the horses.

The animals, already restive, sprang forward in excitement that threatened a runaway, the driver, still with one stiffened arm jerking above his head at every bound of the rig, trying to control them with one hand while the woman shrieked hysterically in the rear.

Jethroe sidled to midstream, cautioning the two men as he went.

"Baptizing ceremonies are over," he said. "When I give the word you can climb out and hike. Don't hurry, and don't look back. I've got a rifle across the stream and I'll use it if I have to."

Crablike, he reached the farther bank where for a moment he watched the dripping pair plodding up the dusty road. Then he picked up the specie-box and ran swiftly over sand and shingle to where he had hidden his horse. He splintered in the side of the box with a heavy boulder and uncovered packages of bills and rolls of shining coin.

"Not much silver, that's good," he muttered, as he crammed his saddle-bags with the loot.

He tossed the broken box into the brush and mounted, all in desperate haste.

"None too much of a start," he said, urging his horse along a narrow path that soon wound sharply upwards. "Got to get ahead long enough to blind the trail. Guess I've got away with it. They didn't seem to spot me. Alice'll keep her mouth shut. I'll tend to that."

CURLY AMES, shivering like an anxious dog from excitement and suspense, walked to and fro on the ridge of Lone Mountain, watching the trail and returning to a sunny boulder where he had smoked one cigarette after another, until the last comforter had been reduced to ashes. His horse cropped contentedly on the short turf that patched the crest.

"Well," he cried querulously, as Jethroe topped the ridge. "What went wrong?"

"Wrong?" Jethroe exultantly slapped his saddle-bags. "I pulled it off slick as a whistle."

"You mean you got it?"

"Sure I got it. What's the matter with you?"

"I saw you tearing along up the trail wearing that mask thing as if the whole county was after you. That's a fool thing to do. You might have met some one any minute."

"Not along this road," replied Jethroe somewhat shamefacedly, as he tore off the scarf and tossed it away. "I was in too much of a hurry to think of it I reckon. Mount up, Curly. We've got to get out of here."

"Time enough to split the plunder. I'll ride faster and feel better when I've got my share aboard. Something might happen, Jeth, and we might have to separate."

"Nothing's goin' to happen if you get a move on you. And there ain't goin' to be no separatin'. Come on!"

"I want my share of the swag, Jeth, now. Dump it on the flat rock here and I'll play cashier. It won't take a minute."

Curly's fingers went dexterously to work stacking rouleaux and apportioning the packages of bills. Blue jays scolded as the coin clinked on the granite, and inquisitive squirrels peered around tree-holes at the disturbers of their privacy.

"Fourteen thousand, two hundred and eight fish apiece!" he exclaimed, checking off. "Twenty-eight; four-sixteen. That's some haul, Jeth. What did I tell you?"

They stowed the money in their saddle-bags, Jethroe completing his task first as Curly patted his stacks of yellow coin affectionately. He strolled over to where a gap in the brush overlooked the trail.

"Up you get, Curly. On the jump! Here comes the first of 'em. Feller on a roan, ridin' trail. After us all right. We've got to slide."

Half an hour later the two came out on the banks of the Little Coyote. Curly's horse had strained a shoulder slipping down the steep hillsides, and both the animals were in a lather and their riders scratched by the thick brush.

The Little Coyote, Summer-shrunken, flowed between wide stretches of sand-bordered by shingle on the nigh side, leading to a barren rock outcrop on the farther, where the walls of the ravine, broken by side *arroyos*, rose abruptly several hundred feet.

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Willows marked the course of the creek. The men halted at the edge of the shingle and dismounted.

"Here's where we fool 'em," announced Jethroe. "Strip your saddle, Curly, and take off your coat and shirt."

He set the example and busied himself spreading out the blankets and clothing in a narrow carpet on the hard, fine sand. Along this he led the horses while Curly renewed the strip from the rear. Finally the water was reached and Jethroe glanced back across the sand.

"Same thing t'other side up to the rocks, Curly, then up Dry Gulch into Red Arroyo and back across Big Coyote to my prospect. They'll puzzle some over which way we've gone. Keep them things dry goin' over."

AS THE passage of the Little Coyote was achieved, Sandy, back on the ridge of Lone Mountain, was investigating the cigarette ends left by Curly about the big boulder that had acted as a telling-counter.

"Two of 'em, Pete," he announced, slipping the mouthpieces into his pocket. "Now who smokes tailor-mades in camp? Not many of 'em, I'm thinking."

He had come across the stage waiting for the agent and the drummer, as he rode down from Jethroe's cabin towards the crossing on his way to Bluemount. The driver, hailing him with relief while he tried to silumtaneously straighten out his harness and quiet the scared woman, regaled him with the news of the holdup. He finished his version as the saturated and muddy couple came limping disgustedly along, the little drummer trailing far behind the agent, who seemed far more concerned over the loss of his personal property than that of his employers'—a not unnatural frame of mind under the circumstances.

"Chucked my shotgun in the stream after my pipe—and pinched my other gun," he growled.

"How much was in the box, Ned?" asked the driver.

"How'd I know? Pay-roll for the Summit Mine. 'Bout twenty-five thousand, I reckon."

"Goin' to get the sheriff after 'em?" asked Sandy.

"Deputy-sheriff McGowan, at Argentina. He'll get up a posse likely. Better join in, young feller, there'll be a reward, won't they Ned?"

"Surest thing you know, as soon as I get to Bluemont and the wire workin'. You aimin' to get it?" the agent asked Sandy somewhat sneeringly.

"I might take a hand," admitted Sandy. "What'll it amount to? Not that I'm greedy, but I always like to know the size of the pot."

"Five hundred, I reckon. You goin' to Bluemont?"

"I'm goin' to take a look for your bandit. What did he-all look like?"

"Tall," said the driver, "heavy set, black slouch hat, blue shirt and had gloves on. His pants was wet so you couldn't tell the color. Had on a mask thet covered his face all the way down. Might hev' had a beard for all I know."

"That's a fine description," said Sandy ironically. "Easy to pick him out anywhere, provided he don't change his clothes. What was the mask?"

"Some black stuff, I think."

"Id was a blue handkerchief mit poker dots," said the drummer snuffling. "I wish I had a dozen of theb, I've caught a fide cold."

"It was a regular red bandanner," contradicted the woman, recovering from her fright.

"Red nothing," said the driver.

Sandy looked whimsically at the agent.

"I didn't see nothin' but the guns," he admitted frankly. "An' if sich was made, I'd say they was ninety caliber."

"Well," said Sandy, "much obliged for the information and sorry for you all. If I see the gent, I'll mebbe find out the color of his hanky and the size of his guns. So-long, folkses."

As he rode down to the ford he thought out his line of action.

"Mighty li'l use bringin' him in, if I find him, Pete, until that reward's stuck up, or all we get is a 'thank-you kindly,' an' a reputation for bein' easy. But the first thing to do is to find him, so move along, li'l hawss, while the trail is fresh."

Beyond Big Coyote, the trail, as Jethroe had predicted, was open. The footprints of the bandit, weighted down by the heavy box, were plainly visible. The thicket disclosed the splintered casing, and the most amateur eye could have noted the recent passage of a horseman forcing his way up

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the steep and little used path that led presently into an old logging road, twisting up the flank and shoulder of Lone Mountain.

Here the going was slower, there were bytrails leading in, and out of one of them new tracks came to join with those he was following.

"Five hundred Pete," said Sandy, as he remounted after smartly scrutinizing the clustered hoofmarks, "will buy that saddle an' bridle of Slim's for you, a new outfit for me an' leave something to play with. Also I could teach that brushfaced ol' holedigger that he don't know all about draw poker. Or we might hit the railroad for Reno. There's a right smart chance for entertainment in Reno, and the stake ought to be lucky money.

"It sure looks like two of 'em," he continued, a question answered by the discovery of the cigarette ends and the tracks that led from the ridge.

At the edge of the shingle by the Little Coyote Sandy confessed to being baffled.

"They've got flyin' hawses, I reckon, Pete," he said. "They've blinded tracks somehow and it's too close to dark to waste time guessing. We'll go back to the crossing. A feller's got to get *to* a place as well as *from* it. Mebbe we can pick up a trail from the willers. Anyway, we know there's two of 'em, a heavy an' a lightweight. One smokes tailor-mades—an' that's the lightweight I reckon; an' his hawss is lame in the off shoulder. Let's try back."

Crossing Lone Mountain ridge once more Sandy found another clue, fluttering from a thorny vine.

"Whew!" he whistled, examining it. "The mask! And black. Driver was right."

He fingered the figured brocade.

"I've seen that stuff somewhere's before," he thought. "Somewhere, a bit of stuff the twin of this. Where?"

The search of the willows on Big Coyote by the scene of the holdup revealed fresh indications of a horse and rider that had broken through the undergrowth. Sandy's practised eye identified the hoof-marks.

"Gettin' warmer, Pete," he said. "Looks like you'll be sportin' that saddle yet."

The prints guided him to a trail that brought him at last to the head of the pocket valley where Jethroe's cabin stood.

"I'm hornswoggled," said Sandy, "ef it ain't him. The sidewinder! I might have guessed it. The pore li'l woman, an' the kid."

He rode on to the cabin. Margy was playing on the steps with her doll and ran to him directly she saw him.

"Hello, kidlets," said Sandy. "Where's your ma?"

"Muvver's gettin' the cow," said the child. "See my dollie. She's all jessed up."

Sandy looked admiringly at the doll. It's former nakedness was now covered by a long-skirted garment wound bunchily about it, and fastened generally by one safety-pin at the back. Suddenly he leaned from the saddle.

"Thet's sure some swell dress, honey," he said. "Let me see it."

She handed him the plaything, which he examined closely.

"Her folks all dead?" he asked.

"M-m'm," negatived Margy. "Why?"

"Because she's wearin' black. Where'd you get the dress?"

"I found it on the floor. It used to be muvver's scarf, but I spec' she cut it up for somefing. Don't you like it?"

"Red'd be better, 'count of her eyes an' her black hair. Don't you think so?"

"I ain't got red," said the practical Margie, evidently struck with the idea.

"Tell you what let's do." Sandy untied his silk neckerchief. "I'll trade you this for the black."

"Oh-o-oh!" shouted Margy, jumping up and down in ecstasy. "That'll be just grand."

She unpinned the dress and the exchange was made, Sandy putting the black remnant about his neck while Margy enthusiastically started work on the new gown.

Sandy rode down the little valley without sighting Mrs. Jethroe, somewhat to his relief. Once in the shelter of the woods he compared the mask with the discarded garment of the doll. Twilight was gathering fast but there was no question as to the identity of the material.

"Everything but the eyeholes," said Sandy. "This is one of 'em, sure. Pete, thet five hundred looks mighty close. We'll have to go back to Argentina for a spell, li'l hawss. Move along."

V

MONDAY evening found the bar of the Big Strike saloon in Argentina crowded with men, drinking at the expense of deputy-sheriff McGowan and

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listening to the exploits of that worthy and his posse in their three days hunt after the bandit. The driver of the stage told for the thirtieth time the details of the holdup, a description that—much to Sandy's satisfaction—ranged farther from the original with very repetition.

"So I says to the chap, 'Where's thet cow-feller?' I says to him—did'n I? 'You go on,' I says, 'while the trail's hot an' you'll catch him.' Tall feller, he was, with a mask made out of a bandanner an' I ketches a glimpse of a black beard below it. Had two guns, one was one of them noo-fangled ottermatics and t'other a forty-five Colt's. 'You're a cool one,' he says to me when I dares him to touch the mail. 'You'll do time fer this,' I says, an' he fired point blank at me.

"I starts the hawses as soon as I seen his eyes flash, an' he missed, an' up the road we goes with the stock runnin' hell-bent, an' ole lady Bennett yelling blue murder in the back seat. We goes nigh a mile before I gets 'em in hand an' waits for that sheeny drummer an' Gates. Gates, he figgered he'd lost his job anyway an' didn't fuss none, but ef I'd had his gun no feller would hev got away with any stuff I was handlin'. He didn' get the mail, you bet, no sirree!

"Then this cowchap—oh, there ye are—comes up an' I says to him, 'They'll be a reward, young feller; you chase thet trail while it's hot.' An' he did—but he ain't claimed no reward yet, sheriff, has he? Heh-heh-he! Not yet, I reckon."

The men looked at the announcement freshly pasted on the wall.

$500 REWARD

For the arrest, or for information leading to the arrest of the man or men guilty of holding up the Bluemont-Argentina stage at Hayes Crossing, Friday P. M., June 29.

The above amount will be paid by

WELLS FARGO AND COMPANY

"I followed the trail all right," said Sandy amicably, "but it ran into a blind."

"Well," said McGowan, "we've got a good idea of the party an' we'll lay our hands on 'em before long. It's the work of old-timers, thet's a cinch. They probably had you covered all the while from both sides of the creek. Good night, me an' the boys is goin' to turn in. We've got an early start an' a long ride termorrer. Come on, boys."

He led his posse from the saloon.

"Too bad you lost that trail," said one of the men to Sandy. "You might hev got thet five hundred right off."

"Reckon ye had it all figgered how ye was goin' to spend it?" queried another.

"Sure," laughed Sandy. "Had it all laid out down to the last nickel. Line up, it's my treat."

He paid for the round out of his sadly diminished pile. The waiting game was an expensive one on a thirty dollar bank-roll, but the reward for which he had been waiting had only been posted after the stage got in. Meanwhile Jethroe was in the camp and had been much in evidence since Friday night, though he had declined an invitation to join in the posse on the ground that his prospect was showing signs of a strike.

"One of the boys says as how the sheriff figgers it's the Andersen gang," said the bartender. "They was let out the penitentiary three weeks ago."

"More'n likely," agreed the driver. "Bud Andersen was sparkin' old man Nichols' daughter before he got caught with the rest in the train robbery."

SHOUTING and the pounding of horses hoofs sounded from the street.

The driver and Sandy went to the door. Two men, riding with drunken abandon, galloped past, wheeled and came up to the saloon door where they dismounted with a swagger.

"What's the reason, Jeth?" asked the driver.

"Celebratin', Dave. The prospect's turnin' out to be a mine an' I'm buyin'. Come on."

"That li'l hawss of yours 'pears to be a bit lame in the shoulder," said Sandy casually to Jethroe's companion.

"What's it to yer? 'Smy horse," replied Curly Ames truculently.

"Sure is it your horse," said Sandy, and followed him in.

The crowd was lined up at the bar and Sandy joined them, standing next to Jethroe. The bartender set a glass by him and he poured out a measure of whisky. Curly edged in on the other side of his confederate.

"Gimme six packs of them Hareem cigareets of mine," he demanded, tossing a five-dollar bill on the bar. "Take the drinks out of that. Who wants a dope-stick?"

He offered an open box to Sandy.

"I like mine hand-rolled," said the

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cowboy, his left hand casually in his coat pocket and his right about his glass.

"What's the matter with these?"

"Well, for one thing, their mouthpieces mess up a place an' they're sure mighty conspicuous."

"How d'ye mean, conspicuous?"

"Nothin', only they sure leave a trail. I found a lot of these mouthpieces on Lone Mountain late Friday afternoon. Seemed like they was fresh smoked."

The package of cigarettes dropped from Curly's nervous hands on the floor.

"Found something else," went on Sandy quietly, keeping his eyes on Jethroe who had swung around facing him. "Looks like a mask. Ever see it before?"

He drew the mask from his pocket and held it out to Jethroe.

"What in —— d'ye mean?"

"You dropped it."

Swiftly Jethroe's hand fell towards his right hip and his gun came out with one motion from the holster. Simultaneously Sandy jerked his glass of whisky into Jethroe's eyes, blinding him with the sting of the raw spirits, while his left hand shot forward and broke the bandit's gun apart.

The bar-room was in an uproar instantly. Sandy dominated it, thrusting his gun into the pit of Jethroe's stomach as he cried:

"There's your holdup, boys! Git up against that wall, Mister Jethroe, while I relieve you-all of your guns. Line up thet city chap with him, some of you fellers. He was in on the deal. One of you go for the sheriff. Stand still, Jethroe! I'd as lieve shoot you as not. You're a pore sort of a skunk anyway."

Curly, doughy-white at the threatening faces about him and the sudden revelation of the mask and the cigarette-tubes, broke down.

"I ain't in on this," he whined. "There was only one man did it. Ask him—" he indicated the driver—"there was only one man, I tell yer."

"Shut up, ye crooked little fool," snarled Jethroe, standing against the wall, hands above his head, under the menace of the cowboy's weapon. "See here, men," he went on, "are you goin' to stand by an' let this cowrunner, who comes from no one knows where, start a deal like this with a bit of black rag he's picked up somewhere? He may have turned the trick himself for all you know."

"Not him," put in the stage-driver. "I met him ridin' to'ards the Crossing."

"A blind, while his pal worked. I put in my afternoon Friday at the prospect, an' I can prove it. He comes here an' says he picked up this mask on Lone Mountain——"

"I did not," said Sandy. "I said I found it but I didn't say where. How did you know?"

The shot told, and Sandy took the remnant of the scarf from his breast pocket.

"I found the rest of it, too," he said. "Mebbe you know where *this* comes from?"

Set back for the moment, Jethroe glared at him.

"Of course you've got the rest of it," he retorted. "That's a poor bluff. Suppose you give us some information about yourself for a change?"

"What's all this?" interrupted McGowan, entering with his two aides.

"I charge this man with holding up the stage, and this one—" Sandy pointed to Curly, who had shrunk away from Jethroe and stood nervlessly between two men—"with aiding and abettin'. That's what you call it, I reckon."

"Charging ain't proof, my son," said McGowan slowly. "It's easy to charge when they's five hundred hung up for the talkin'. Jethroe here's a family man—been here quite a spell. We'll go easy at the start."

"Here's the proofs," said Sandy, laying on the bar the two pieces of the scarf with a palmful of the cigarette mouth-tubes from Lone Mountain.

The sheriff's two assistants stood by Jethroe and Curly while the men crowded to look at the evidence and listen to Sandy as he detailed his trailing of Jethroe, the loss of the trail at the shingle bar, the finding of it again at the willows, the lameness of Curly's horse, the fact that he was the only one in camp to smoke Harem cigarettes, which had been stocked especially at his request; and the matching of the mask with the remnant used by Margy for her doll's dress.

"Also," he concluded, "this young city chap has been displayin' consid'rable wealth these last few days. You might ask him where he got it. It's a cinch he didn't earn it."

The narration, concisely told, had its effect. The crowd fell back from the accused men, leaving Jethroe defiant and

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Curly wilted in the charge of the assistant deputies.

McGowan bit off a chew of tobacco and replaced the plug in his pocket, masticating slowly.

"It's a pretty good hand you show, stranger," he said. "But you can't put a stale trail in as court evidence. It ain't no crime to smoke cigareets on Lone Mountain, but I reckon I'll hold the pair of 'em overnight on that mask. If we can tie it up termorrer accordin' to your story, I reckon I'll take the two down to Bluemont. You'll have to come too, as witness—also for your five hundred."

VI

AS THE little cavalcade entered the clearing the next morning, Alice Jethroe prepared to face bravely what the tortured thoughts of a sleepless night had prepared her for. She recognized the sheriff riding ahead of her husband and Curly, both evidently guarded by two others. Sandy's presence she wondered at vaguely.

McGowan approached the matter with all the tact at his command.

"We come along, mum," he said, taking off his hat and mopping his forehead, "we come along on a little matter of identification."

He looked appealingly at his assistants for aid, fanned himself with his hat vigorously and blurted to the point.

"This scarf, mum, now—" he produced both pieces of the silk— "might it be your property?"

The woman looked at him steadily and said nothing.

"Yer don't hev to answer, under the law, seein' as it's your husband as is in trouble. Unless it ain't yours. Is it?"

"No," she answered in a cold, even voice, without glancing towards Jethroe. "I never saw it before."

"There now," said McGowan, palpably relieved, and mopping away at his forehead. "That settles it, I reckon. You meant well, young feller—" he turned to Sandy— "but it don't look as if you cashed in this trip."

"There's the kid, Mac," said one of his deputies. "Better ask her."

"Blamed ef I wouldn't have passed that up. Come here, little un."

Margy, who had come to the door of the cabin, advanced shyly, fingers in mouth, hugging her doll with the other hand.

"That's a fine baby you have there," said the sheriff, "and a pretty dress she has on. Where'd you get it, m' dear?"

Margy pointed a wet and friendly finger at Sandy.

"He giv it me," she said. "We traded off, we did."

Jethroe cursed suddenly and loudly. His wife looked at him irresolutely, then ran sobbingly towards him.

He cursed again at her.

"Queered me, —— you," he said. "Nice kid, to send its own father to jail! Why didn't you lock the brat up?"

After the two prisoners had been started back to the camp, handcuffed and despondent, under the care of the two aides, McGowan tried in clumsy fashion to console the weeping woman while the bewildered child clung to Sandy. Alice Jethroe, still sobbing, besought only to be left alone. McGowan motioned to Sandy and the two rode off together.

"I'm sorry for her," said the sheriff, "though it's a good riddance and she'll come to see it after a bit. She's sure a plucky one."

"You ain't goin' to do nothin' to her, are you?" asked Sandy.

"What for?"

"Lying about the scarf. Perjury, ain't it?"

"Perjury? Thet ain't perjury, son. Thet's *womanhood*. I'll fergit it."

"I sure thought she'd be plumb grateful to me for gettin' shet of that skunk," said Sandy, "but I'm hornswoggled if she ain't cryin' her eyes out over him."

"She'll get over that," replied McGowan. "Tears, with wimmin, is general just a sign of a thorough housecleanin'. She'll be more worried over the disgrace to her kid, later. Where's her folks, I wonder?"

"Back in Ioway, she told me, near Dubuque. How long before I touch thet reward, sheriff?"

"'Bout two weeks, 'cordin how long they takes to get a committal. Anxious to start paintin' up the town?"

"Well, for one thing, sheriff, I don't mind tellin' you thet I'm plumb busted."

"Ef thet's all thet's troublin' you I'll advance some on your witness fees to get along with."

"Pete, li'l hawss," said Sandy, later, as he

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road ahead of the stage towards Bluemont. "It's right piney and sweet up here in the mountains, ain't it? But I reckon you an' me has got to go to chasin' cows over the hot perrairee at forty per, an' you with the same ol' saddle I'm a settin' on now. Here's the ford. I reckon thet Jethroe chap an' his city pal back there ain't partickler stuck on crossin' it neither. Move along, you ol' pie-eater; we'll get you a drink before they come up."

VII

ED HARRISON, late of Nevada, called up his foreman on the stable phone.

"Hitch up the bays, Clem, right away!" he said. "I've got to run into town."

He set down the 'phone and reread the telegram he had just received.

ED HARRISON,
Elm Vale Stock Farm,
Dubuque, Iowa.

Friend Ed: Am wiring you five hundred. Please arrange to rewire same from Dubuque to Mrs. Alice Jethroe, Argentina, Nevada, with following message: "Am wiring five hundred from unexpected deal. Come home, Dad." Wire me Circle Bar Ranch, Hooper County, when sent. Will explain later when I see you—hope soon. Your old cowchum, SANDY BOURKE.

The owner of the Elm Vale Stock Farm tucked the telegram in his pocket.

"The same soft-hearted, derned old sap-head," he commented. "*Mrs.* Jethroe! A widdy, for six bits. Sandy must have struck a gold mine the way he's scatterin' the dough. He sure needs a guardian."

The next *Sandy Bourke* story will appear complete in the June issue.

Range Broke

By Mary Carolyn Davies

YES ROPE my broncho, pardner, from the ranges where he's roaming,
We loosed him from his tether just a year ago tonight
When I said good-by at sunset to the plains of old Wyoming,
And you told me I'd regret it—well, pardner, you were right.

My ears deaf to her calling, I will leave the East behind me,
For the West is waiting for me like a sweetheart, lips aglow;
For Eastern eyes are weary, Eastern charms too old to bind me,
Her eyelids droop too heavy, and her pulses beat too slow.

Range and sky and dusk and dawning, and the sage-brush dim and graying,
Where the sun comes up to meet you as the ponies top the rise!
Where the coyote's howls come gliding down the coulee as you're riding,
And every night the sun floods all the valley as it dies.

Chaps and quirt and gray sombrero, and the silver spurs a-jingle!
Oh, to leave the city's grumble for the place I used to know,
Where the purple of the sage-brush and the gray road intermingle
And a strip of silver ripples in the cañon far below.

Does the dawn come up, I wonder, as it used to over yonder,
Sudden gold above the Rim-Rock? Oh, the dawns there used to be,
When we rode the range together in the hazy, lazy weather,
When all the world we knew about was wild and young and free!

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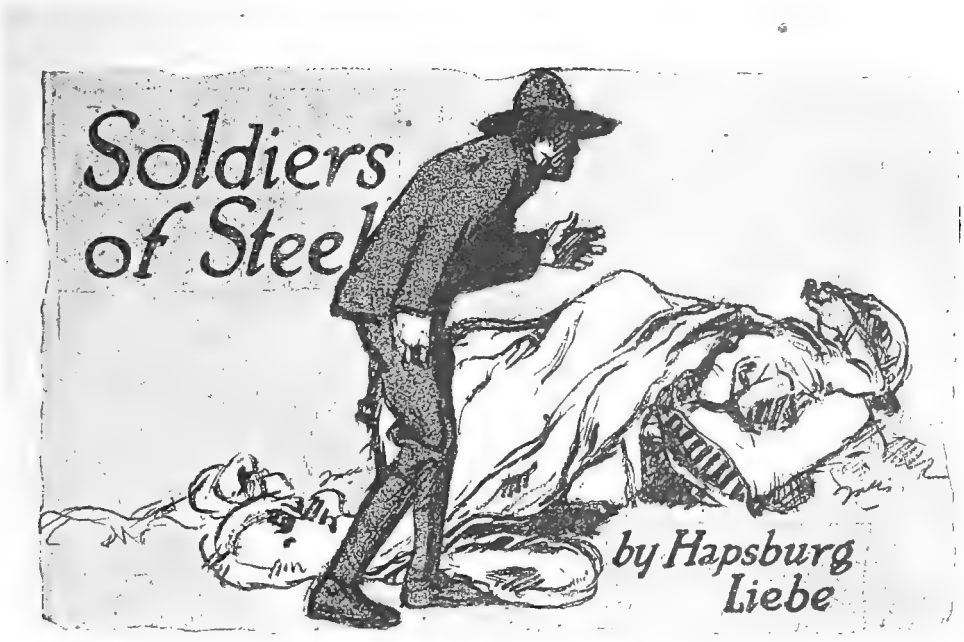

Author of "The Silent Torreys," etc

BIG Sergeant Francis Evatt, U. S. Signal Corps, in charge of the telegraph office at Santa Rôsa, Philippines, turned in his chair as the rapping ended, and invited the caller to enter. The door was pushed open and a slender, sunburned youth, lithe and straight as a savage, appeared on the threshold.

"I'm Tom Shelton, from Shelton Laurel, North Carolina; belong to Company D,—th Infantry, at Aringay; was took sick and hauled to the hospital here after night; got well and was ordered to report to you for duty as messenger until a chance comes to get back to my company," announced the newcomer.

A smile of amusement and welcome spread itself over the big sergeant's countenance. Smiling was easy for him. He arose, stretching forth a hand.

"Glad to see you," he said cordially. "I've been having to depend on my lineman to deliver messages—else do it myself. Mountaineer, I presume—eh?"

Shelton nodded, gently withdrew his hand, and began to look about the room.

"I'm a New Yorker," Evatt went on, still smiling, "but I've always had a big liking for mountaineers. We'll get along, I'm sure. There's a bed for you—over there."

Thus met two men whose destinies were to be woven and interwoven, strangely wound and twisted together, within the short month that followed. It would have been hard for one to believe, then, that each of these men, so widely different in so many things, would have been willing to die for the other at the end of that month—though neither had reached his thirtieth year, and the days were to them roseate with the love of living, so characteristic of youth.

IT BEGAN immediately, and the starting-point was so small that it seems almost ridiculous. An old non-commissioned officer of the cavalry regiment stationed in Santa Rosa strode in with the air of one who owns everything but Heaven, and in the haughty, overbearing manner that had caused him to be detested by most of his inferiors, ordered Tom Shelton to go and sweep out his room, which was in the same old Spanish government building as was the telegraph office, although in another wing.

The young mountaineer turned and eyed the grizzled sergeant-major in mingled anger and amazement. He had barely borne with army discipline, because he had been born as free a man as ever lived; this was worse. A serf? Not he! There followed a moment of absolute silence.

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And during that silence Sergeant Evatt rose from his seat at the table on which were the telegraph instruments. Evatt had not falsified when he said he liked mountaineers: their sincerity had always been a thing of admiration to him; their simplicity, their unaffectedness, was to him a great and wonderful virtue. He understood the throb that had shaken Shelton's whole being better than Shelton understood it. He feared that his new messenger would say something that would cause much of unpleasantness; for he knew that Sergeant-major Bartow was bitter as gall in his dislikes and vengeful as fate. He stole up behind Shelton, waiting.

"Well," snapped Bartow, assuming a leaning-over-backward pose, "are you going to do what I ordered you to do?"

Tom Shelton threw back his fine head and narrowed his keen, clear eyes, while his jaw began to creep outward.

"I'd see you——" he began, when Ser- Evatt clapped a hand over his mouth. Then Evatt told him to go and sit down, which he did without even a look of reproach. In this the mountains understood New York as well as New York understood the mountains.

Evatt faced back to Bartow, and so well did he keep in check his real feelings that only the flashing of his deep, gray eyes gave evidence that he was resentful.

"Non-commissioned officers do not have orderlies, I believe," he said very quietly. "That man is my messenger, and I may need him any moment. You will have to get some one else to care for your apartment, I'm afraid."

Bartow's face, always cold, hard, emotionless, seemed now to freeze. He began a speech of stinging words, the pith of which was that Sergeant Evatt was unfit for the three little V stripes that adorned his sleeve, the stripes that he had worked so hard and so faithfully to win. And Sergeant Evatt, unable to hold himself in and still believing that he was protecting his honor as a man, struck the offender a straight-arm blow in the chest, a blow that sent Bartow reeling backward into the hallway. He then closed the door and locked it to prevent taking further steps toward injuring one whom army discipline forced him to call a superior.

When he turned, he beheld young Shelton standing near him, a cocked revolver in his right hand, his face white and rigid as if in the grip of death. There is small room to doubt that the sergeant-major would have drawn a weapon under the cloak of his superiority had not Evatt closed and locked the door between them. And there is even less room to doubt that if Sergeant-major Bartow had drawn a weapon Tom Shelton, born a free man, would have killed him. On Shelton Laurel no man wore a cloak of superiority.

Evatt trembled as he realized the narrowness of the escape. He put a hand on the young mountaineer's shoulder, and with the other gently took away the cocked revolver, letting the hammer down carefully and then returning the weapon to its holster.

"Never kill a man," he said earnestly. "The men who deserve killing are not worth killing. My boy, remember my words as long as you live: never take a life unless it is to save your own. Had Bartow drawn his revolver, he would not have used it."

Without a word Shelton turned and went to the window, where he stood looking absently toward a drilling troop of cavalry. But a few minutes later he faced about quickly.

"Sarge," he breathed, hoarse with his still unabated anger, "old Bartow is comin' with the officer-o'-the-day and two guards. They're goin' to arrest you for hittin' the sergeant-major!"

Evatt smiled wanly and unlocked the door. With that he sat himself at the table and assumed a careless air. Scarcely controlling himself, Shelton began to look out at the window again.

Closer came the measured tramping, and soon a lieutenant and two guards, together with the sergeant-major, the latter wearing a look of mingled exultation and hatred, entered the telegraph office. Evatt was arrested on the charge of having assaulted a superior, and a summary court vindicated army laws by giving him a sentence of three weeks at hard labor. A cavalryman who understood the working of the telegraph was detailed to fill his place.

TOM SHELDON became silent as a sphinx, bitterly silent. He would stand at the window for hours, watching his friend Evatt work on the street in company with a motley crowd of insurgent captives and a few soldiers serving little sentences for dissipating. Sometimes

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a tear would find its way down his tanned cheek; sometimes he would utter a curse aloud. When he saw them in the shade of one of the few palms that stood along the crooked streets, he would feel glad and wish there were palms everywhere. He knew that Evatt was unused to such work, and that it was going hard with him.

Many times he tried to get into communication with the prisoner whom he esteemed so highly, and several times he attempted to take choice food to him; but there was always a rifle in the way. At this Shelton would grow pallid with a keen feeling of injustice, and wish with all his might that the man behind the carbine were in North Carolina—with him.

The night before Evatt's release Shelton overheard a drinking cavalryman say something to a comrade that caused his heart to pound with sheer delight. He had come up behind them in the darkness, and they had not known of his presence. At the mention of the thing that interested him so much, he stole along cautiously behind them, dodging from shadow to shadow, creeping crawling, determined to know it all. He did learn it all—and it was regarded by him a great deal to learn.

Evatt returned to duty at the telegraph office looking five years older than he had looked three weeks before. His skin was burned almost to a blister, and his hands were sore; his eyes were sunken, and his cheeks were gaunt and hollow.

But Shelton felt that the blemish on Evatt's hitherto spotless record had hurt even more than the toil, and that thought cut him deep.

Shelton believed in revenge. It had been born in him to get even for a wrong, and he meant to play his high card at the first opportunity. He had made no mention of it to Sergeant Evatt, for he feared that Evatt would not regard it a fair procedure.

The next day the opportunity came.

Sergeant-major Bartow, under pretense of being anxious to learn of the insurgents' movements in the country about Namacpacan, but really to taunt Evatt with his presence, strode into the telegraph office. Evatt looked up, went pallid under his sunburned skin, shook his head, and turned back to the sounder. He did not wish to pass words with the man who had caused him to give three weeks of his life to serving a sentence under a guard.

"Well, can't you talk?" Bartow sneered. "Did the little grind in the mill take your tongue? I asked if there were any reports from Namacpacan?"

Evatt, powerless against the brutal sergeant-major, again shook his head, pretending to be unusually busy with the sounder.

Then Tom Shelton rose from his seat on a corner of the table and took one short pace toward the haughty visitor. He quivered in every fiber of his young body, and his whole countenance flamed with both defiance and hatred.

"No," he said in an icy tone, "there is no reports at all from Namacpacan. But," he continued slowly and meaningly, "there is some reports from Palisipasa."

It was now Sergeant-major Bartow's turn to go white. But he recovered himself and smiled.

"What are the reports from Palisipasa?" he asked.

"The report is," answered the mountaineer, "that a certain regimental sergeant-major went out there one day with twenty men on a hike."

Again did Bartow go pale. But he recovered as before with quickness.

"There's nothing alarming about that, that I can see," he shot back, now thoroughly on his guard.

"But that ain't all of it," said Shelton with a glance toward the wondering Sergeant Evatt. "The rest of the report is," Shelton pursued doggedly, "that the sergeant-major somehow got a whiff of the enemy's powder-smoke, and run off and left his men with the bag to hold!"

"Bartow raised his brows in pretended surprise. But despite his iron disposition he could not keep his gaze from roving restlessly on objects beyond the young man who was delivering the accusation.

"Who was the sergeant-major?" he asked.

"The first letter of his name is Sergeant-major Bartow, the tin soldier!" was Shelton's astounding answer. "At least them's the reports I got from Palisipasa."

Evatt leaped to his feet, resolved to protect Shelton from the wrath of the brutal Bartow if it cost him a year under guard. Bartow put a nervous hand on the butt of his revolver, and as quickly took it away. There followed a moment of charged silence.

Then huge, bearded Captain George Seay, of whom it had been said that his greatest purpose in life was to see that everybody

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beneath him had a square deal, entered the room behind the sergeant-major. He had heard every word of the conversation between the messenger and Bartow, having approached unobserved by any of the participants in the little drama.

The three saluted. Captain Seay pointed a big finger toward Tom Shelton and said coldly—

"You're the messenger here, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," Shelton answered. "Tom Shelton, from Shelton Laurel, North Carolina; was with Company D,—th Infantry; got sick at Aringay, and was took here in a bull-cart to the hospital after night; got well and was ordered——"

"Why were you saying what you said to the sergeant-major?" the Captain interrupted.

"He's got it laid up for Sarge, there, and I wanted him to know I'd heard the reports from Palisipasa so he'd let Sarge alone."

"How do you know there's anything in such reports."

"I didn't say I knowed it," Shelton answered quickly. "I just said they was reports."

"I suggest that you be careful about accusing a superior," growled Captain Seay. "I don't believe you are aware of the seriousness of it, or I would put you under arrest." With that he wrote off a message for Manila, after which he left the building.

Bartow then ordered the mountaineer to step from the office for a moment. When Shelton had gone he said to Evatt:

"You regard yourself very cunning, don't you? Take my word for it, if there's any more talk of Palisipasa in connection with me, I'll see that you are dishonorably discharged from the United States Signal Corps. I can do it, whether there's anything in the report or not. I tell you, Evatt, I can ruin you!"

Without waiting for a reply he turned and went to his quarters.

When Shelton came in, Evatt told him of the sergeant-major's threat. And all that day the two sat at the table and worried, for they felt that Bartow would do all in his power to hound Evatt to disgrace.

EARLY the next morning, Colonel Wendell, a man with iron-gray hair and beard, entered the telegraph office and requested that Sergeant Evatt step into Sergeant-major Bartow's apartment, adding that he wished to see him there presently. Evatt saluted and replied that he would go immediately. Thereupon he cautioned Shelton to be on the alert for the Santa Rosa call, which Shelton had learned, and walked hastily down the long hallway and to the room occupied by the man who had recently been so bitter an enemy to him. At the door he rapped. There was no response. He rapped again, and again was there no answer. He pushed the door open and entered, an impropriety made necessary by the colonel's orders.

Across the bed, his clothing torn almost from his body as if from a long and violent struggle, his hard face contorted from the last pain he would ever feel on earth, lay Sergeant-major Bartow, dead and cold.

Evatt, strangely fascinated, hardly realizing that which he was doing, crept nearer to the still form. His first impression was one of wonderment. He hadn't thought that Bartow's face could show so great an emotion, even at the hand of death; it had always seemed a face of stone, incapable of human feeling. Then he gave a gasp of horror. For deep in the dead man's left breast was his—Evatt's—own clasp-knife!

There, he thought quickly, gathering himself together with an effort, was evidence that would condemn him as the murderer of Bartow, innocent though he knew himself to be. Deciding that his own interests demanded it, he crept still nearer to the ghastly thing and drew out the red knife. With a shudder that racked his whole being, he wrapped it in his handkerchief and thrust it into his pocket. Then he stepped backward and turned to the door, meaning to give the alarm.

But as he opened the door heavy hands were placed on his shoulders, and a deep bass voice told him that he was under arrest for the killing of Sergeant-major Bartow. Watchers had seen him take away the knife and hide it—they had been there for that purpose. He did not protest his innocence; he seemed too dazed to talk, or even to think.

The harsh and accusing voice of Colonel Wendell again came to his ears, sounding now as if it had come from afar.

"I thought so," it said. "You were the man with the motive. So we trapped you!

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Very careless to leave your knife, last night, I'm sure. We'll have your court-martial at once, while there are enough officers available. Whom do you want for your attorney?"

"Captain Seay, if you please, sir," Evatt somehow found voice sufficient to answer.

The little journey to the stone walls of the old Spanish *carcel* was made by the accused man as if walking in a sleep disturbed by strange and horrible dreams. When the rusty lock had grated behind him, he sank to the hard, damp floor of his cell, feeling utterly helpless for all his giant strength. *His* knife! Yes, it had been done with his knife; there was no denying that. It was a well-handled thing, and many had seen him with it. But——

He straightened, rose to his feet, vibrant with a memory that gripped him to the core of his heart. For he had lent that knife to Tom Shelton the day before the tragedy, and he was sure the young mountaineer had not returned it! But having remembered this gave Francis Evatt not one whit of relief.

"Poor Tom—he did it for me; and then blundered by leaving my own knife to convict me," he whispered to the prison gloom. Of one thing Evatt was sure: he would never tell that Tom Shelton had borrowed that knife.

In a fever of unrest, he began to pace the dark cell. After a few minutes spent thus, he approached the one high, barred window and looked out across the little, palm-lined square and toward the telegraph office.

He saw that which almost made him burst into tears: To save him, Tom Shelton had confessed to the crime; he was coming toward the old *carcel*, a guard on either side of him, his revolver and belt gone. Evatt grasped the bars of the little window in order that he might not fall. Through a mist he watched the slender young man who had liked him so well as he walked erect and proud as a freshly crowned king toward the looming gray walls of the prison. In a flash he thought of all Tom had done; of how sympathetic he had seemed.

Yes, he would protect Tom Shelton to the end. For it had been but an effort on the part of the mountaineer to shield him from the fire of the sergeant-major's hatred that had caused the latter's death.

His splendid resolve to sacrifice himself for his friend was no more than renewed when there was the grating of the key in the lock and the officer whom he had requested appointed his attorney appeared before him.

Captain Seay stood for a moment in the doorway, evidently trying to accustom his eyes to the gloom of the cell.

"Come out here, Evatt," he ordered gruffly. "I understand that you have asked that I represent your interests in the trouble you're into."

"Yes," Evatt confirmed. "But there's little use in it. I'm guilty—I confess."

"Shelton, the messenger, also has confessed," said Captain Seay fingering his beard.

"Shelton—has confessed!" exclaimed Evatt, pretending to be astonished. "He had nothing to do with it! I——"

"Why shouldn't he confess?" the captain broke in. "It was all through your trying to take his part that the trouble came up. He's a mountaineer, and sticking to a friend is a thing that was taught to him in his mother's milk."

"But I tell you he had nothing whatever to do with it!" Evatt cried.

"Tut!" Captain Seay interrupted. Then he shook one finger under Evatt's nose and said with a frankness almost brutal: "Evatt, you're a liar! You had loaned the knife to Shelton, and it was not in your possession at the time of the killing."

Evatt smiled faintly and threw out his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"We're going to have a sort of preliminary now," Captain Seay went on. "Let's go. Never mind, guards. I'll be responsible for the prisoner."

So Evatt walked beside his attorney to the quarters of Colonel Wendell. On the way they passed several cavalrymen whom Evatt knew personally, and one of these men smiled to him and formed a few soundless words on his lips.

"It's all right!"

It was all right! Evatt thought differently. Not while Tom Shelton was a prisoner and facing a charge of murder was it all right. He shook his head and walked on, now and then answering a question put to him by the captain.

TO HIS surprise, Evatt found that Shelton was already there. About the spacious room, standing and sitting, were most of the officers of the regiment stationed in Santa Rosa, all waiting

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silently but with evident interest. Evatt took this interest to mean that the dead man had been popular with his superiors; which was a faulty conclusion, for Bartow had been liked only because he was apparently an ardent disciplinarian and a perfect drill-master. Silently he took a chair across the room from Shelton, while his attorney took a seat beside the colonel, who sat at a desk near a window facing the street.

After a whispered consultation with Captain Seay, the colonel rose and swept the little gathering with eyes that seemed very bright.

"I want to talk a few minutes, gentlemen," he announced, his voice almost breaking with a strange huskiness, "and I don't care a tinker's embankment whether it's regular or not.

"First, let me say that I have not words enough to sufficiently express my heartfelt gratification at seeing a man whose father wore the gray of the Confederacy, and a man whose father died in a blue uniform, each trying to shield the other because they are friends. And to shield, in this instance, means that each is willing to die to save the other."

The audience, wondering, was silent as a tomb. The two prisoners looked toward each other and each thanked Heaven that he had chosen the course he had taken—thanked Heaven for the privilege of wresting so great a jewel from the breast of disgrace. The colonel resumed:

"Gentlemen, as you already know, when there is a crime we naturally look for the man with a motive. It would appear that Sergeant Evatt had a motive in that Sergeant-major Bartow had threatened him with dishonor if there was any further mention of a certain incident that occurred at Palisipasa, Sergeant Evatt fearing that he would be hounded whether there was further mention of the incident or not. Besides, Sergeant Evatt had served three weeks at hard labor in the broiling sun at the instigation of the sergeant-major.

"It would also appear that Private Shelton, a big-hearted but hot-headed young mountaineer, had a motive in that he wished to save his friend from dishonor—especially as the whole trouble had its origin in Evatt's taking Shelton's part. But there was a motive greater than these. And it was one of revenge. Captain Seay will now address you."

The officer named rose from his chair at the regimental commander's side and looked the two prisoners squarely in the eye, first one, then the other. They returned his gaze without a quaver.

"I want the truth," said Captain Seay. "Which one of you killed Sergeant-major Bartow?"

"I!" came from each.

Captain Seay turned to the colonel and smiled. The doughty old commander said he'd be damned if it wasn't beautiful, and the captain again faced the audience.

"When I heard Private Shelton accuse Sergeant-major Bartow of cowardice," he began, "I suspected that there was something to it; but I acted as though I gave it no credence to put the deceased off his guard. I remembered the hiking trip in question, however, and I also remembered whom Bartow had taken with him. I sought these men, and they confessed that the sergeant-major had played the part of an arrant coward in a little skirmish at Palisipasa. They had been paid never to tell it.

"After I left them, one of them stole to Bartow and told him that I knew all. To have his term of fifteen years in the army ended by a trial for cowardice was more than Bartow could stand. But, vengeful to the last, he wanted to get even with Evatt, whom he gave credit for having dug the secret out; therefore, stealing Evatt's clasp-knife from the telegraph office, he disordered his clothing to have it appear that there had been a struggle—and killed himself. The quartermaster, whose room is next to that of Bartow, saw Bartow have the knife the evening before the tragedy. Gentlemen, we have just had shown us a remarkable example of soldiers of steel—and one soldier of tin."

Beside himself with the relief, the New Yorker, his hand stretched gropingly before him, stumbled blindly toward the mountaineer—and he had a little less than half the way to go.

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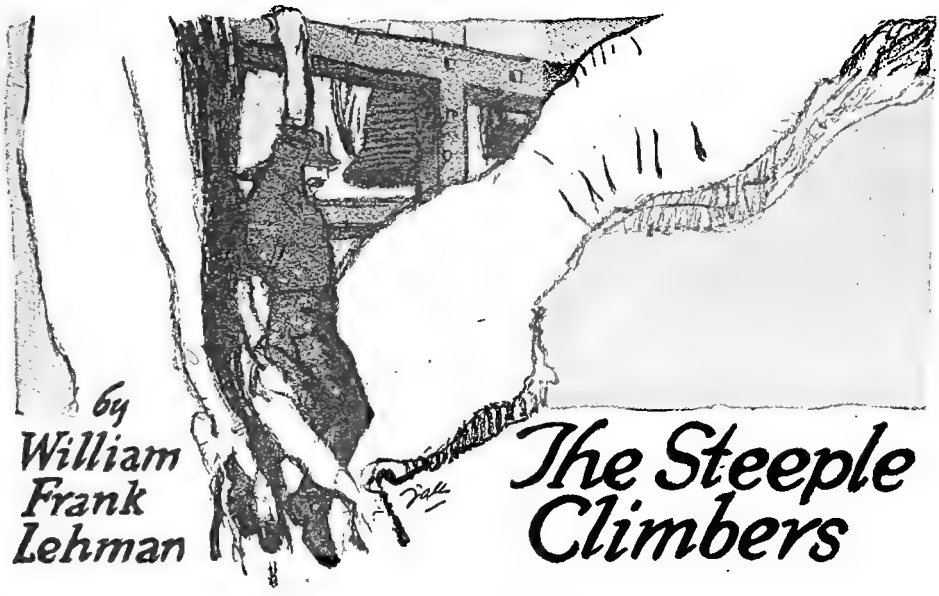

by William Frank Lehman

The Steeple Climbers

THE new Fire Commissioner had been in office only a short time when an ugly lot of rumors settled over the entire department. At first the men discredited these petty whisperings—laughed them off with knowing nods and winks. "These things always come with a new Commissioner," quoted the old men who had seen officials come and go with every change of administration.

Then came the order—the storm behind the wind; transfers, pensions, promotions—the biggest shake-up in the knowledge of the department. History was made and the legends enriched when Captain Kendall of Truck Twelve read the changes to the crew at roll-call, after which he placed the order on the patrol desk for the men to peruse at their leisure. As soon as the officer's back was turned, Tom Boyle, the senior man, snatched the paper from the desk.

"Just listen ter this."

"July 20, 1913

"Office of the Fire Commissioner

"GENERAL ORDER No. 17:

"It is my intention to replace the older members of the department with young men. In accordance with this plan some of the members of Truck Twelve will be sent to the suburban districts, where the work is easier, and new men will fill their places.

"By this method it is hoped to build up the fire-fighting force on the working companies with young, active men, fresh from the gymnasium and fire department drill-school, who will be able to climb a church steeple and extinguish a fire on the weather-vane.

"TRANSFERS

"The following transfers will take effect next Friday at 8 A. M. . . ."

"Yer don't care anything about the rest of it now. Yer all know where yer gettin' railroaded, an' why. But what gets me is this steeple-climbin' junk. We kin put it all over any of these new guys — these steeple-climbers, at any kind of a fire. It takes time ter develop a set of leather lungs that ther smoke don't croak at ther first crack. Well, let 'em come."

Boyle tossed the paper on the desk and trooped after the rest of the men to their forum, the smoking-room, where the now famous order was further discussed.

The commands stood and the transfers and retirements were made. New faces appeared in the smoking-room. The house was divided in two factions. The feeling was manifest in every move. As soon as the old men left for the suburban houses, the remaining original members moved their beds on one side of the bunk-room and the new men were forced to sleep on the other. The smoking-room was divided by an invisible line over which the steeple-climbers were forbidden to step or sit.

The trouble was not confined to the house. One of the steeple-climbers came in with the rating of a chauffeur. The second time he took the truck out he slammed the whole outfit into a shop window. Lack of experience in handling motor apparatus allowed Truck Four, their rivals on the other side, to beat them to fires. They came into their own dooryard and plastered a building with ladders. Captain Kendall was almost insane, for Twelve was a working company

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and had one of the best crews that ever threw a ladder. The old men lost heart.

"Aw! What's the use," complained Boyle, "ter try ter do anythin' with so many green men? One or two's all right, but six —an' our best men gone ter the country."

For over a week the strife continued. Bloodshed, imminent many times, was prevented only by the wiser counsel of the old men.

II

TOM BOYLE stood sullen and silent in front of the locker which was supposed to sacredly guard his ladder-house possessions. The fighting expression on his face and the restless opening and shutting of his hairy, seamed hands proclaimed the mute warning to the rest of the crew to "stand back before the walls fell." He had neglected to revile O'Leary about his boasted claims on the "crib" championship; that frenzied game of "cinch" he and the "Bone" took from Turkey and McAlvin was forgotten. Boyle was mad—212 degrees Fahrenheit mad.

Viciously slamming the door, he whirled about and faced the crew in the locker-room.

"Who had my night hitch?" he demanded, holding the rubber boots and trousers at arm's length.

The men gathered around Boyle.

"Who had 'em?" he repeated, disgustedly dropping the outfit. "Look at the right boot—cut clean through."

The crew, loudly proclaiming their innocence, gravely inspected the cut.

"I'll find out," threatened Boyle, shaking his head. "An' when I do, look out!"

He dropped on his knees and put his hand in the only pocket in the rubber trousers.

"Ah!" he cried exultantly, rising with a tobacco-pouch in his hand. "It's yours, ain't it?" he sputtered, shaking the leather bag bearing the initials R. A. T. in Trevere's face. Before the accused man could reply Boyle renewed his abuse.

"Yer the only one in the house that smokes ladies' terbaccer." (Boyle's characterization of cigarette tobacco.) "Yer used my boots at that stable fire, didn't yer? Yer cut 'em, then sneaked off an' never said a word. Been on ther truck more'n a week an' ain't got a hitch of yer own yet."

Trevere could not deny the ownership of the pouch.

"I did use 'em," he admitted.

Boyle, ignoring the admission, pointed to the initials R. A. T. on the bag.

"That's it. Yer a rat. Graftin' on ther day-off men. Whaddye got ter say?" he demanded.

"Nothin'," answered Trevere. "I told yer I used 'em."

The circle of men, scenting trouble, broadened out, leaving the belligerents in the middle.

"Nothin'," echoed Boyle mockingly. "Goin' ter buy me a new pair?"

"When I get some money after I fix myself up," answered Trevere. "You old guys make me tired. Yer bin in ther business so long yer cranky. Jus' wait," he resumed boastfully. "Ther Commissioner's goin' ter railroad you old guys out in ther country an' put young fellers in yer places. We're goin' ter have our fling in ther department."

The retort stung Boyle. Sparks from the emery-wheel of rage danced before his eyes at Trevere's sharp-edged remark. He had violated a sense of *noblesse oblige* which forbade any reference by the new appointees to the Commissioner's action.

"Well, there's a good punch left in ther old guys yet. Kin yer fight?" challenged Boyle as soon as he could speak.

"Down ther cellar! Fight it out! Paste him, Tom," came the subdued tones from the men.

The factions split. The old men clustered about Boyle. The young fellows stuck to Trevere.

"Yer make me sick," said Trevere faintly, stepping back among his supporters.

"I'll make yer sick," said Boyle, making a grab for the neck of Trevere's shirt to haul him into the room.

Endeavoring to dodge, Trevere slipped and fell back with a crash that could be heard all over the house. Boyle, with his fists still clenched, stood over the fallen steeple-climber in a threatening position. Attracted by the unusual noise the Captain came into the room, catching Boyle in his pugilistic attitude and Trevere lying on the floor.

"What's goin' on here? Fighting?" he demanded sternly.

"He hit me, Captain," whined Trevere.

Looking slowly about the room, the Captain made a mental note of the men present, for they had the faculty of "not seeing any-

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thing" when called upon to give evidence before a trial board.

"Now get out er here an' don't have any more of it. There's plenty er trouble without you two. Yer'll both go down 'fore the Commissioner fer fightin'; that's all there's to it," snapped the officer as he followed the men down the corridor.

Once more the men retired to their smoking-room, the old-timers on one side and the steeple-climbers on the other. It would be impossible to heal the breach now.

III

THOMAS BOYLE, senior man of Truck Twelve, and Randolph A. Trevere, the Commissioner's steeple-climber, faced the trial board together. A single word, "Guilty," was written on the paper the chairman passed to the Commissioner. The punishment was read at roll-call the next morning.

"Ladderman Thomas Boyle transferred to Engine Company 48. Ladderman Randolph A. Trevere shall forfeit one day's pay."

The fight and transfer were serious things for Boyle, who stood high on the list for promotion. It would always be against him. There were other reasons why he would have taken any other form of punishment without a murmur. He had just bought a house within easy riding distance of the truck's quarters, where he could go to his meals and see his family three times a day. This privilege is considered a great luxury by the men who spend twenty hours out of the twenty-four within the confining walls of an engine-house, unless working at a fire. At Forty-eight he would lose all this and see his family only on his day off, unless he sold his little home and moved into the suburbs.

He appealed to McDonald, Chief of the Second Battalion, who had been a private with him on Engine Four. The officer was conversant with the entire case.

"You've been in on charges and this is a punishment," he said severely.

"Yes, sir, I know that," agreed Boyle. "But perhaps you could speak a good word for me at Headquarters."

"I don't usually in these cases. Too many of 'em."

Knowing the Chief was right, Boyle slowly nodded his head in acquiesence and walked away. McDonald put his pipe on the desk and followed him. At the door Boyle turned and made a motion as if to speak, but before a sound came from his lips McDonald, who was close behind, placed his hand on his shoulder. For a second he looked over the form of the fireman and smiled—a shrewd, keen, but not unkindly smile.

"I'll do all I can fer you, Tom," he said earnestly. "Somethin' may turn up so you'll have a chance to make good."

Boyle went to Headquarters. He stood on the dreaded dead-line, that strip of carpet in front of the Commissioner's desk, where so many men heard the words that either made them or broke them.

Great drops of nervous perspiration streamed down his face as he told about the new house he bought for "the Missus and the kids"—how he would see them only on his day off unless he sold the home and moved. He referred to his long unblemished record—his chances for promotion, and how a transfer to another company would deprive him of his seniority. To satisfy himself the Commissioner went over Boyle's department standing.

"Clean, up to now," he admitted in a tone which sounded good to Boyle. "Your deportment has furnished me an opportunity to put a new man in your place, but I'll reconsider your case."

With a curt nod the Commissioner terminated the interview. Boyle saluted and walked slowly back to quarters.

"Guess it's all over. I'm canned," he said grimly.

IT WAS at the Wednesday morning roll-call that the Captain read the order containing Boyle's punishment. The transfer was to take effect on the following Friday. That night the officer called Boyle to his room and ordered him to take charge of the auto chemical which shared their quarters and was manned by a detail of men from the truck.

"Who's on with me?" asked Boyle.

"Trevere's on tonight. He's the chauffeur," answered the Captain.

"Ther steeple-climber?" he asked maliciously.

"Yes. Are yer afraid ter ride behind him?"

"Afraid? I should say not. Only if we get a good workin' fire, look out for fallin'

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walls. I'll put it all over that feller yet."

"Be careful," admonished the officer with a slight smile.

"I'm on—an' we'll beat ther truck in ter ther box," responded Boyle as he went up to the smoking-room.

When Captain Kendall selected Boyle to cover the chemical he forgot the animosity between the men. The fireman's words had brought the situation to his attention and he could not suppress a smile.

Boyle and Trevere were the objects of many remarks in the bunk-room. All the men were hoping for a run before morning to see how the pair would get along. Slowly the bandying died away, and in its place there came the deep, heavy breathing of the sleeping men. Outside a thunder-storm flashed and boomed.

IV

THE quarters of the truck and chemical were in the Eighth District, which embraced the boxes beginning with two; consequently when the tapper struck two blows and paused, it was sure to be a go for both companies. Even during the night two strokes on the little bell would awaken some of the men, while a box beginning with any other number could hit off without disturbing anybody but the man on watch, whose duty it was to count them.

Two blows!

"It's a go, fellers," shouted Boyle, whose trained hearing caught it first.

He swung out of bed and into his boots. One suspender thrown hastily over the shoulder held his trousers until he reached the sliding-pole. As he sped downward, his right hand automatically threw the other suspender into place—a scientific "hitch," without a lost motion. He was on the apparatus floor before the man on watch had counted the box number and sounded the big brazen fire-gong.

Trevere was the last man down. As he sleepily and clumsily stumbled to his position on the chemical Boyle asked angrily:

"What's ther matter? Chloroform on yer piller?"

The last few scattering drops of rain driving in his face was Boyle's first intelligence of the thunder-storm. He clung to the rail on the back of the auto and worked himself into his rubber coat as they tore through the pools of water. The tail-light of the Chief's car was disappearing up the street.

The truck roared along close behind—too close to suit Boyle. It would be an everlasting disgrace to have the ladder company pass them.

The chemical could make better time. Trevere was not driving to suit him. Climbing along the running-board, he bellowed in the chauffeur's ear.

"Where d'yer think yer are—on parade? Let her out."

Trevere nodded and threw the machine into high speed.

"That's ther stuff," said Boyle, as he resumed his station. "Now we're goin'."

Savagely yanking the bell, he had the satisfaction of seeing his machine slowly draw away from the truck and start up the long climb to box 276.

From the bottom of the hill Boyle saw one of the strangest fires in his long experience. The very apex of a church-steeple was burning. Like the beacons of old, lighted to guide the mariners safely to port, it guided the firemen to the top of the hill. There it stood, outlined against the black sky, bidding them defiance. To Boyle it said:

"Come on, you steeple-climbers. Come on."

"That's lightning. Nothing else but the hand of the Almighty could set that fire," thought Boyle devoutly.

The chemical raced up the semicircular driveway and came to a stop beside the Chief's runabout. Boyle reported to the Chief.

"Chemical Twelve," he said to McDonald, while Trevere sat idly on the seat watching the fire.

"Trevere!" shouted the Chief. "Come here. You're on this company. There ain't any horses ter hold. Git an ax. I'm goin' ter send ther other apparatus home. We'll attend to this fire."

Trevere came up with the ax.

"Open up ther door," ordered the Chief. "Easy, easy. Let Boyle do it. I want ter keep ther damage down. Do a good job," he said in an undertone; "this is where the Commissioner goes to church. Most every Sunday he walks through this very door."

Boyle gave a low whistle as he took the ax. With two neat swings, one above and one below the big knob, he removed the lock.

"Good work, Tom," said the Chief

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admiringly. "Come on with ther line," he ordered, rushing through the open door. Flashing his lantern about, he found the stairs. "This way ter ther belfry."

Boyle and the steeple-climber followed the Chief up the stairs over a short ladder and then through the trap-door leading to the belfry. Here the hot embers, showering down on the big bell, fell to the floor and had started numerous incipient fires which the three rubber-coated men stamped out. One glance up the tower and the Chief finished his plan of attack.

"Trevere," he said sharply, "that's your fire. Go get it. Boyle's too old. Yer one of ther steeple-climbers. Yer'll never have a better chance. Git on Boyle's shoulders. Grab that cross-bracing and pull yerself up. Look alive, now."

Boyle stooped; the steeple-climber clambered on his broad back. He grabbed the timber and hauled himself up.

"Hold on!" screamed McDonald. "How do yer expect ter put that fire out unless yer take the line with yer?"

The second attempt brought Trevere into the base of the steeple. Now the actual fire-fighting began. Would the steeple-climber attain his object while the older man had been shoved into the background by McDonald, who had promised to give him a chance? Why didn't he give Boyle the opportunity to make that climb? Boyle felt hurt as he stood and passed the chemical line to the steeple-climber making snail-like progress from timber to timber. The chief moved restlessly about, stamping out the falling embers.

"I'm goin' ter see how she looks from ther outside. Keep that fellow goin'," said McDonald as he went down the ladder.

IT WAS a one-man job. Hampered by his heavy boots and coat, Trevere made slow progress. The Chief came back into the belfry.

"Come on!" he cried. "Look alive! Fire's gaining."

Boyle knew this from the way the sparks were falling and the unceasing crash of slate. The coupling at the end of the first fifty feet of hose had not passed through Boyle's hands when Trevere stopped.

"Chief! Chief!" he shouted in a strained voice. "I can't make it."

"Go on. Yer got ter make it," shouted the exasperated McDonald.

"Timbers too close. It's too hot in here," answered Trevere.

The fire was gaining, working its way slowly down. Every minute was precious as the flames fed on the dry wood behind the slate. Boyle smiled, a malignant, mirthless smile, knowing that the steeple-climber must be getting a fine taste of fire-fighting at his first chance to distinguish himself in the eyes of the Chief, with whom he was not a favorite. The chemical line was motionless.

"Whaddye say?" asked McDonald.

"I'm comin' down. It's too hot," was the astounding answer.

"Go back! Get in there," thundered the Chief.

"Yer can't live up there. I'm comin' down."

The steeple-climber threw the hose over a beam and started down. Without a word from the Chief, Boyle ripped off his coat and threw his boots into the corner. Running his thumbs beneath his suspenders he threw them higher on his big shoulders. Then he grabbed the chemical hose. Hand over hand he went until he reached the cross-timbers where he met Trevere. For an instant Boyd looked at him.

"Yer a —— of a steeple-climber!"

Trevere hung by his hands and dropped to the floor in front of the Chief.

"Yer might's well call him back," he began. "Yer can't put the fire out that way. Ther thing gets too narrow, an'——"

"Shut up!" roared McDonald. "Git outside. Yer yellow!"

The Chief grew nervous—as nervous as was possible for a man with twenty-five years fire-fighting to his credit. He followed Boyle from timber to timber by the uncertain flicker of the fire. He measured the length of chemical hose with his eye, endeavoring to see how far Boyle had gone. Perhaps his judgment had been wrong. If he had imposed an impossible task, Trevere would have an excellent excuse for his action and McDonald would have some awkward explanations to make.

"Are yer all right?" he called.

Back came a muffled, grunted "Yes."

The hose bound and stuck fast as Boyle worked it around the braces. He had to go back and lighten up on it, work it slowly up inch by inch. The dust of years had accumulated in the steeple. It strangled Boyle.

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"Oh, if I only had ther big line so I could get a drink——"

His head reeled. The hot embers stung the backs of his bare hands. The neckband of his shirt choked him. Frantically he tore it open. He was stifling.

"Get back; give me air," he gasped thickly. "Ventilate. Smash them windows."

But his voice was too husky for the Chief to hear.

Up another foot—Boyle fighting for a goal, McDonald gnawing his mustache in the grand-stand. There was Trevere's face grinning at Boyle, mocking him in the sneering tones, "the Commissioner's goin' ter railroad you old guys."

"I'll fix yer," he growled.

Snatching his heavy fire hat from his head, he swung it madly at the tantalizing apparition. *Crash!* went the glass in the little diamond-shaped window in the side of the tower. The clear cool night air rushed in. Eagerly he sucked in great lungfuls of the fresh ozone. His head cleared and he realized where he was and why he was there.

"Must 'a' been near gone that time," he reasoned as he resumed his climb.

Protruding nails tore his flesh. His head beat and pounded. The steeple grew smaller. There was Trevere grinning at him again right in the flames. Boyle's head was bursting, his throat closed.

"Water, water!" he gasped. Now Trevere had a big bucket of water and was spilling the cool liquid just out of his reach.

"Water! Water!" he shrieked deliriously. "Gimme water."

McDONALD heard the agonizing cry. Thinking that Boyle had reached a position so that he could hit the fire, he ran down the ladder to where Trevere was standing beside the chemical.

"Charge ther tank!" he shouted.

"Water! Water!" repeated Boyle as Trevere continued to taunt him from the flames. "I'll git yer," howled Boyle, pointing the nozzle at the hated face in the fire.

With a splutter and cough the chemical fluid hissed through the shiny brass nozzle. The face disappeared as the flames died away. The chemical drenched Boyle; he was partially himself once more. Air swept in where the top of the tower had burned off. His brain became clear—he was the fireman on duty. He had made good. Standing hatless and bleeding, with his bare head only a few feet below the remaining sparks, he directed the stream as calmly as if steeple fires were a mediocre event in a fireman's life.

"Hurrah! He got it!" ejaculated the delighted Chief. "That's all," shouted McDonald as the flames disappeared.

Boyle seized the charred boards and tore them away to be sure there was no fire lurking beneath the slates.

"Come down," ordered the Chief.

Wet, dirty, and almost exhausted, Boyle crept back to the belfry — he never knew how. When asked about it he would never tell.

"Guess me guardian angel musta carried me down," he would answer. "Don't ask me."

Trevere stayed out and coiled up the chemical line while McDonald waited for Boyle. Limp and weak, he stood before his Chief. Awkwardly placing his bleeding hand to his head, he attempted to salute, but staggered and would have fallen. McDonald grabbed him.

"Put it over them steeple-climbers that time," muttered Boyle.

"That's what yer did," answered the Chief, but Boyle did not hear him. Trevere and McDonald lowered him through the trap-door, but it was McDonald that carried him to the street.

"Tom," he shouted to his driver, who was standing at the box to catch any alarms that might come in, "take this feller ter ther hospital. I'll go home on ther chemical."

It was long after daylight, Thursday, when McDonald finished his report of the fire and Boyle's steeple-climbing.

V

FRIDAY morning came, and with it Boyle from the hospital, his hands bandaged and the hair burned off his head. The transfer was to go into effect only two hours later. McDonald was nervously curling his gray mustache to conceal his agitation.

"Anything doing?" asked Boyle.

"No," said the Chief, shaking his head. "I don't understand it. I did all I could for you."

Boyle turned sadly away to where the crew were lined up at roll-call listening to the Captain. He read the trite details in

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the same monotonous voice he had used for years.

"Ladderman Thomas Boyle is transferred——"

Seven short sharp rings on the telephone, the Chief's call, interrupted him. Thinking it might be a still alarm for the company, he waited. No word came from the Chief—evidently the truck was not going out. Mechanically he reread the order.

"Ladderman Thomas Boyle is transferred to Engine Forty-eight as a punishment——"

"Hold on!" shouted McDonald, coming down the pole with a paper in his hand. "Read this instead."

Captain Kendall took the paper and adjusted his glasses. His voice took on a new tone and his eyes sparkled.

"The transfer of Ladderman Thomas Boyle is hereby revoked——"

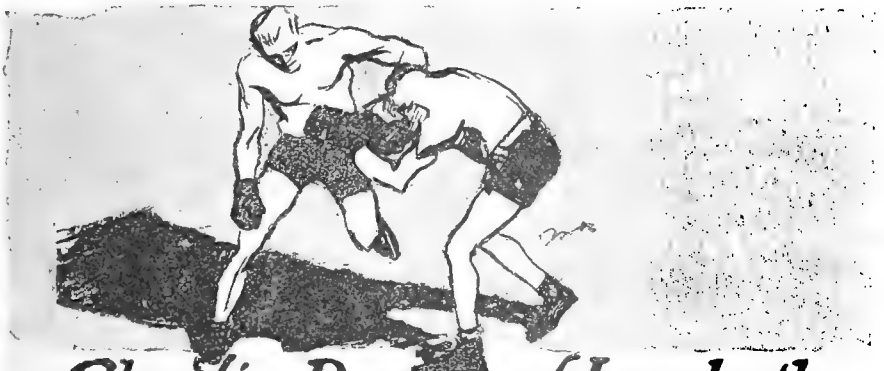
The applause of the crew interrupted. Captain Kendall held up his hand for silence.

"And he is thanked by the Commissioner. He is to be granted three extra days off and commended in General Orders."

Again the applause interrupted.

"If yer'll wait till I get through, yer can cheer if yer like. Only give me a chance," said the Captain.

"Ladderman Randolph A. Trevere is transferred to Engine Forty-eight, and reprimanded in General Orders for conduct unbecoming a member of the department."



Charlie Brown of Lambeth.

A Complete Novelette by W. Townend

Author of "A-Roving," "Private Harris," "Irish," "Oil at San Nicolas," etc.

CLIMATE is not the only reason for the lack of excitement in El Nogal. But the mind of man being curiously sensitive to its surroundings, climate undoubtedly helps. The long days of blazing sunlight, and the blue skies and warm scented breezes of southern California promote contentment, and the inhabitants of El Nogal, being perfectly, boastfully contented with what Providence has been pleased to give them, enjoy to the fullest extent the benefits of living. None more so than Mr. Dickson, who keeps the post-office and store at the corner opposite the small depot and switch where the box-cars jump the track.

The store is the center of the life of El Nogal. Here groceries, Stetson hats, chinaware, overalls, jumpers, tools, lemon-pickers' sacks, gloves, clippers, fruits, candy, tobacco and cigars are kept in stock, also the latest news from each quarter of the district, from as far south as the Mexican line with its rumors of war and revolution, and as far east as Campo on the high road to Imperial, and the hot country of cantaloups, cotton and cattle.

Mr. Dickson himself, dignified in appear-

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ance, small of stature, plump and inclined to baldness, possesses a certain sympathy of manner and a kindliness of heart that has endeared him to his fellow-men. An inveterate talker, his views on politics and religion are held to be sound by those that should know. His opinion is freely asked on the most abstruse subjects and as freely given. No meeting of the Improvement Club passes without his presence: no speeches earn so general an approval as do his. He is, in fact, one of El Nogal's most progressive citizens, a leader in thought as in action, prosperous in his business, happy in his home, proud of his wife and children. A man to be spoken of with respect, to be envied and looked up to, an example to others.

Things were not always like this, however. There had been a time when Mr. Dickson would have regarded the postmaster and storekeeper of El Nogal with cold scorn as an inferior, one beneath his notice. And yet in those days Mr. Dickson had been an ill-paid, overworked drudge in a large office, in bad health and full of pity for his own misfortunes, with no prospects of advancement, but clinging tightly to the thought that he could call himself a gentleman.

That he could ever have been persuaded to exchange the excitement and bustle and respectability of a large city, the finest city in the world, for the slow backwater of life in a small ranch-town such as El Nogal, with a general store as the sole outlet of his talents, would have seemed to him impossible. Nevertheless, not only did he do this, but he was from the very first absurdly happy.

In his own city he had been an insignificant little person with no standing: in El Nogal he is some one of importance. The change was bewildering. That it did not turn his head was due to Mr. Charlie Brown of Lambeth, London, S. W. The which is the more remarkable, seeing that the change itself was due also to the same unassuming, incompetent gentleman.

All men have their weaknesses: Mr. Dickson is no exception. Or perhaps in his case it is not so much a weakness as a hobby. Though his range of knowledge includes subjects as wide apart as the laws of banking and mealie bug in lemon-trees, yet there is no topic of conversation which interests him more than the ring. Well informed as he may be on most things, as regards boxers, their methods and their fights, his mind is encyclopedic. He can settle offhand points at issue by the score; but if by chance even he be doubtful of his facts there are in his book-case volumes that can put the matter beyond all argument.

And yet this knowledge, wonderful as it is, extends back no farther than the evening on which he met Mr. Charles Brown of Lambeth.

On the walls of Mr. Dickson's parlor, which, immediately above the store, faces the main business street of El Nogal, are hung framed pictures of famous fighters. Here may be seen Sayers and Heenan, echoes of a glorious past, Bob Fitzsimmons, John L. Sullivan, Charlie Mitchell, Jim Corbett, Kid McCoy, Jeffries, Sharkey, Battling Nelson, Jimmy Britt, Freddie Welsh, Willie Ritchie, Packey MacFarland and Charlie Brown of Lambeth in the most prominent place of all, over the book-case. And of all these fighters Mr. Dickson's favorite, the one of whom he speaks most often and most lovingly, is this same Charlie Brown.

MRS. DICKSON, a bustling little woman, built like her husband somewhat on the plump side, does not encourage visitors; the gallery of portraits is apt to lead to whispers. When visitors are expected, the pictures are discreetly removed. This, while doing no harm, does no manner of good: the entire population of El Nogal having learned of Mr. Dickson's hobby. That the portraits are missing on those rare occasions when Mrs. Dickson entertains deceives no one. It is considered, however, that Mrs. Dickson shows a most proper spirit in endeavoring to hide what is without doubt a blemish in her husband's otherwise perfect character.

Although well aware of his wife's opinion on the matter, and like a good husband strongly averse to giving cause for offense, there are times when Mr. Dickson insists on an acquaintance accompanying him upstairs to view his pictures. Before each he will linger, full of anecdotes, until at last he reaches the photograph of a small, thick-set, square-jawed man, with black hair and a truculent, twisted smile.

"And this?" the visitor will say.

Mr. Dickson, removing his glasses with a certain air of distinction that some one had once said recalled a former President of the

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United States, but which particular one not remembered, clears his throat.

"This," he answers, "this is Charlie Brown." And from his manner his visitor may infer that here is one to be regarded as great.

"Ah! quite so. Sure. But, lemme see now, who was he? Charlie Brown! Where did he come from? I don't remember."

Up will go Mr. Dickson's faint eyebrows.

"What! You mean to say you never heard of Charlie Brown? Well! Well! A lightweight! Saw him in nineteen-ten in San Francisco when he fought his great fight against Bunnie Smith. One of the finest natural fighters I ever saw. Not clever particularly on his feet, but a hard hitter. And able to win fights just through his power to take punishment."

"You don't say!" The visitor can scarcely fail to be impressed.

And always, following out the same program, Mr. Dickson will pause to let what he has to say gather greater importance.

"I remember asking Charlie what he thought of him. Did I tell you he was English? Charlie Brown, I mean!"

"Well!"

"Is he any good?" I asked.

"Good!" said Charlie. "That boy's goin' to be the best ever. Champion of the world, as soon as ever he gets a punch. And that's what he would have been, but for breaking his arm. That finished him. He never fought again afterward. And, believe me, any one that Charlie Brown thought good was good. He knew what he was talking about."

In Mr. Dickson's opinion Charlie Brown is one of those boxers who through no fault of their own, but rather through an astounding run of luck, fail to reach the highest honors of the ring. Which belief is certainly not shared by Charlie Brown himself, who having fought his last fight is now the landlord of a public house in Putney.

It was here through the help of a newspaper much patronized by fighting men that a present from a friend in California reached him: the friend in question being none other than Mr. Dickson, who preferred to remain anonymous. Charlie Brown was pleased, if puzzled.

"*From one whom you taught how to fight.*" So ran the inscription.

"Some bloke I must 'ave been acquynted wiv w'en I was in San Francisco or Los Angeles. Must 'ave given 'im a few 'ints. Wonder 'oo 'e is, an' wot 'is nyme is."

Which goes to show that we may through our own efforts achieve great deeds and yet be in ignorance thereof. For although Charlie Brown did more for Mr. Dickson than ever a mortal did before or since, although he saved his life and his home and all that he holds dear, although his picture adorns the wall of Mr. Dickson's parlor, the fact remains that he has not the slightest recollection of even speaking to him. More than that, he has never heard his name, he is unaware of his existence.

But the story of how Charlie Brown laid the foundation of Mr. Dickson's prosperity shows that for this ignorance he need not be blamed.

IN HIS San Francisco days Mr. Dickson, a failure from whatever point of view, had impressed firmly on his subconsciousness the great thought that when things are as bad as possible they can yet be worse. On this belief he modeled his whole life. Each disaster he accepted with a brooding satisfaction as something he had been expecting for long ages. Why should he, a mere mortal, strive against Fate? It savored of presumption. What was, was! The very thought of struggling frightened him.

His helplessness found vent at times in feeble outbursts of rage, which left him plunged into the depths of pity for himself and his sorrows. Why should he of all men have these miseries heaped upon him? Did he deserve them? No. On that score he was positive.

Would things change? Never. How could they? Had the worst been reached? Probably not!

And the future! On the whole he preferred not to think of the future at all.

It was in this mood that Mr. Dickson stood on the sidewalk of Market Street, San Francisco, one afternoon in October, a pale-faced, dispirited, lean, little man who stared with gloomy eyes in the direction of the Ferry building, gleaming white against a pall of gray smoke.

A hand clasped his elbow.

"Hello, Ed! Where are you going this time of day? What are you looking so miserable for, hey?"

Mr. Dickson turned slowly toward the speaker, an acquaintance who worked on

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one of the newspapers. The necessity for hiding his latest sorrow steeled his nerves.

"Hello! How are you? I'm going home. Headache. Good-by." With a curt nod he walked quickly away.

He was glad that he had kept his secret, and yet what had been the use of lying? In a few days each of his friends would hear what had befallen him. They would be sorry, of course. And at the thought of that Mr. Dickson grunted. *Sorry!* What right had *they* to be sorry? He could imagine the whispers:

"What, haven't you heard? Poor Ed! Inefficient! And at thirty-seven, too! He'll never land another job, will he? Too old!"

For that very afternoon Mr. Dickson, head bookkeeper of the firm of Wallace, Matthews & Green, brokers, had been summoned into the inner office and there informed that after one month more his services would be no longer required. He had listened in blank horror. And the horror was all the greater inasmuch as he had had an idea that the interview had foreboded a raise in salary.

"What!" he had said.

Mr. Wallace had been kind but firm.

"It's no use, Dickson. I'm sorry, but we're cutting down expenses. I've had some serious financial reverses of late, as you-er know. We must economize, at all costs. The office staff is too large for the volume of work."

"But, Mr. Wallace, why should *I* go?"

Mr. Wallace had waved his plump, manicured hand gently as one who wished to smooth over the harshness of his words.

"Now, Mr. Dickson, now, now. It pains me to do this—it pains me very much. But, Mr. Dickson, I must consider my interests before anything."

"Haven't I always considered your interests, Mr. Wallace?" He felt his heart pounding frantically at his ribs as if trying to free itself. "Can't you really keep me? Surely my salary isn't going to make all that difference? There's—there's nothing wrong with me—with my work is there, Mr. Wallace?"

"Mr. Dickson, please, please!" Mr. Wallace's voice was full of regret. "I hate to tell you, but—well, since you *will* have a reason, you will. There has been a marked falling off lately in your—your-er efficiency. You have in fact hardly-er given that degree of satisfaction which we expect of our employees. I could mention several instances that will occur to your mind. And, Mr. Dickson, I have warned you. You can't say I haven't warned you, Mr. Dickson?"

"But, sir, yes, in a kind of way. As a joke, Mr. Wallace. A mere pleasantry, so to speak."

Mr. Wallace rose majestically to his feet. His face was no longer sad, rather was it stern and strong. "The-er interview is at an end. We can hardly serve any useful purpose by discussing the matter farther, Mr. Dickson. In a month then, from today. And-er you had better set about securing another position. I need scarcely say that the very highest references— You-er understand!"

Mr. Dickson had understood.

"Thank you, sir." He accepted his fate meekly, without a struggle.

In his own small room a sudden longing for the fresh air came over him. He locked his desk, changed his jacket, took down his hat from its peg, and made his way out through the big outer office to the elevator.

The elevator-boy, a friendly youth with a proper respect for his superiors, touched his cap.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Dickson."

"Good afternoon, Jimmy. Fine day, isn't it?"

"Goin' out, sir?"

"Yes, I think so. I'm tired of the office."

"Gee! Wish I could get out for a walk on a swell day like this."

Mr. Dickson had laughed bitterly. The time was coming when he could walk at his pleasure on any day, wet or fine, at any hour of the day, without let or hindrance.

WHEN at last, footsore and tired—for he was unaccustomed to exercise—he reached home, a narrow-fronted, frame house, set on the side of a hill in the midst of other houses built after the same pattern, he stood on the door-step and once more considered his prospects. He wanted to be by himself, to think clearly—once indoors he might not be granted the opportunity.

Although with every pace the truth had been hammered into his brain that he had lost his job, that he was fired after ten years faithful service, only now did he begin to realize the full significance of what had befallen him. Never, not even in his most

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extravagant dreams, had he imagined himself as being anywhere but in the firm of Wallace, Matthews & Green. That, amidst his many troubles, had been his sheet-anchor.

Other men might seek for work; not he! He would be spared that shame, at least. But now, he too, at the age of thirty-seven, was thrown on to the world without a dollar. Where in San Francisco could he find a firm willing to employ him? What good were his qualifications? The highest references, no doubt. What good were references, at his age? Candor compelled him to own that his appearance was against him. Was he to be blamed for that?

Worries such as he had had would have aged the strongest. And he was not strong. Far from it. Much bending over a desk had bowed his back; years of indigestion had drawn all color from his face; hot rooms and the wearing of a tight hat had thinned his hair.

The worst had happened, yet might there not be still worse in store! Why struggle against the inevitable? Why prolong the agony? To human endurance there is a limit; with him that limit had long been passed.

THE door opened slowly and Mrs. Parrish, his wife's mother, his own severest critic, appeared on the threshold. Something in her expression drove a cold chill through his heart. He moistened his dry lips.

"What is it?" he said.

"Gordon," she answered drearily. "He's sick."

Mr. Dickson pushed past her into the narrow hall.

"What's that?" he said. "Gordon! Gordon ill! He's not. He was all right when I left this morning." He glared at her. "You're trying to frighten me. I won't stand for it. Gordon's not sick. He's never been sick in his life."

"You *fool!*" The scorn in the old lady's voice hurt him. "You poor fool! It's pneumonia. He's bad."

"Oh, Lord!" said Mr. Dickson. "Oh, Lord! Lord!"

It was a cry of despair wrung from the depths of his tortured being. He steadied himself against the hall table and began to laugh.

"What are you doing home this hour?"

Mrs. Parrish, very stiff and straight, with an austere, sharp-featured countenance and sparse gray hair, watched him narrowly.

With an effort he straightened his back. There was a stabbing pain in his chest, and a mist before his eyes.

"Me? I'm fired: I lost my job. A month from today."

Mrs. Parrish stared at him without comment.

"Well," he mumbled. "Why don't you say something? That you're glad—anything."

"As if we hadn't enough to worry about without that!" she said. "And nothing in view, of course. I might have guessed it."

Mr. Dickson hung up his hat with even more exactness than was his habit and, as if dismissing his troubles from his mind entirely, moved toward the stairs.

"Where are you going?"

"Mayn't I see my own wife?" he asked with an elaborate sarcasm. "Mayn't I? You run this house, I know, but——"

"No. The doctor's with her now."

Mr. Dickson stumbled into the parlor. For a while he gazed blindly out of the window, seeing nothing. Then he sank into a chair and sat with his head in his hands, coughing weakly.

"Mr. Dickson!"

Some one was in the room, speaking to him. He sprang to his feet to find the doctor at his elbow.

"Well, doctor, I never heard you! How are you?" He swallowed nervously. "Well," he said thickly. "*Well!* What now?"

"I'm afraid Mrs. Dickson's no better. She's—she's had a good deal of pain. Nothing to worry about, Mr. Dickson, but—I think if I were you I'd have a nurse in the house. For a week, anyhow. There's too much for——"

A nurse! Mr. Dickson shook his head.

"No, doctor, I'd rather not. She wouldn't like it. I guess we'll let things be. Her mother can do all the nursing that's needed. I can help, too. A capable woman, Mrs. Parrish. Very capable, indeed."

The doctor nodded in sympathy.

"I know, I know. We're all more or less feeling the pinch just at present, but—well, if you can't manage it, you can't!"

"The little fellow?"

"Not at all well. But you're not to

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worry. See! You mustn't. Worry never helps."

Mr. Dickson was seized with a fit of coughing that left him helpless and out of breath.

"H'm! Do that often?" said the doctor rubbing his chin.

"Sometimes," said Mr. Dickson hoarsely.

The doctor turned him so that the light from the window fell on his face.

"H'm! I'll have a look at you one of these days. I didn't like the sound of that cough. Didn't like it at all. I've been watching you of late, and—and——"

"Well?" said Mr. Dickson feeling very weak and shaky about the knees.

"You'll have to be careful. You're on the verge of a breakdown. I tell you what it is, Mr. Dickson, you need a thorough rest. If you don't get away from business for a while, you'll—well, I'll have *you* on my hands as well as the others. Now that's straight. Take a rest, right now, or you'll be down with an illness."

Long before the sound of footsteps had died away in the distance Mr. Dickson had returned to the parlor and was giving way to his mirth. A rest! He had been told that he needed a rest! A long rest without any work! The chances were that for once he would obey a doctor's orders implicitly. In a month's time he would be able to take as long a rest as his health demanded. More! A rest would do him good. In his opinion both his employer and his doctor saw eye-to-eye.

He uttered a little moan and buried his head in his hands. He too was ill. Why? Why should *he* be ill? Was it not enough that his wife should have been bedridden for three whole months without this? His savings, such as they were, had vanished. Bills flooded the letter-box. Soon there must be a reckoning. For another month he would be paid, and then where was the money to come from? How would they live? Ill? He could not afford to be ill! That was a luxury for the rich. And yet—again he hammered the awful, paralyzing truth into his head—he himself at thirty-seven was without work, without money and without hope. What remained? There was a ring at the door, but he did not move.

Was life worth while? Dimly, as if in the far distance, he was conscious of voice talking in hushed whispers.

What if he were to die?

"Ed!"

He raised his head.

"Hello!" Mrs. Parrish, entered the room followed by a broad-shouldered, clumsy young man, with a round, red face, a stubby, black moustache and clothes that seemed two sizes too large for him.

"You might have answered the door, Ed," she said fretfully. "Here's cousin Alfred come to ask after Alice. And Ed——" She broke off indignantly. "Can't you try and show some sign of intelligence? For the land's sake! Sit up." She turned to the stolid-looking young man. "Can you wonder, Alfred, I lose my patience with a thing like that! Can you! Look at him! My daughter's husband!"

"Ed," said the big young man, "you've lost your job, ain't yuh?"

"He has," said Mrs. Parrish. "I was expecting it every day this past year."

Mr. Dickson breathed heavily.

"What's that got to do with you?" he queried.

Alfred fingered his round, dimpled chin.

"Nothin'. But, listen! I never did think much of you, Ed, an' you know it." Frankness in speaking his mind seemed to be one of Alfred's strong points. "I thought Alice was out of her senses when she married you, an' I wasn't the only one as did. Now, see here, I want some one to help in the store. You willin' to try it? I'll do what's right by you, for Alice's sake!"

"An' very kind of you, indeed, Alfred," said Mrs. Parrish. "Most kind!"

"What's that?" said Mr. Dickson. "The store?"

He could hardly believe his ears. That Alfred Clark, a man who had been in love with his wife before he himself had known her, a mere common storekeeper, should come to him with any such proposal was an insult, not to be borne meekly. He leaned forward in his chair.

"The store!" he repeated.

"Yes, Ed," said Mrs. Parrish severely. "The store! That's good English, ain't it?"

"I'll pay all yer expenses down from San Francisco to El Nogal," said Alfred. "I know you ain't gotten a cent in the world, Ed; you never had. You always looked a bit down on fellers what made their livin' out of groceries, didn't yuh? You wanted a job in an office, in a boiled shirt an' white collar, didn't yuh? An' yuh got it, hey?

"Well, now you know. You ain't worth

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much to me yet, but I'll start you at seventy-five per, an' let you live over the store. That's more than I ought to be givin' you, too. An' besides that—" he paused to let the full effect of his words sink in— "there'll be a chance for you to get a share in the business. In six months, about, I'm opening another store in the city, San Diego, an' I'll have to have some one to look after the place in El Nogal. It's up to you to make good."

He smiled with the air of one who has done a fellow mortal a good service.

"Alfred," said Mrs. Parrish, "it's my belief you've saved this family from starvation. It is indeed."

It was Mr. Clark's smile more than anything else that decided Mr. Dickson. His troubles were forgotten in the anger that surged through him.

"Indeed! So you'd like me to leave San Francisco and go to work for you in El Nogal, hey? In a store! Hey? You expect Alice and me to bury ourselves in a little one-horse village in southern California—for seventy-five per month! Is that it?"

"And a house to live in!" interjected Mr. Clark. "Don't forget that, Ed!"

"And most liberal, too," said Mrs. Parrish. "Where else would he find any one fool enough to offer half that?"

Mr. Dickson cleared his throat.

"I wouldn't work for you, Alfred, if there wasn't another job left in the United States. No, sir. Do you really imagine I can't get another position in San Francisco, Alfred?"

"I don't imagine," said Mr. Clark clamly. "I know. Who's going to give *you* work? A man your age, looking as old as you do? Besides you've got a cough, and——"

Mr. Dickson stood up, raging inwardly with anger and shame. He shook his finger at the red-faced young man.

"When I want any charity, I'll ask for it. I don't have to rush off to the other end of the state to find work in a grocery store. No, sir! I'm pretty well acquainted in San Francisco. I've friends who'll be only too pleased to offer me employment on my own terms. See! San Francisco's my home, and I'll stay in San Francisco. And, lemme tell you: another time don't you interfere in what don't concern you!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Clark. "If it wasn't for —for——"

"I've never been so mortified in all my life," said Mrs. Parrish. "Never."

"You're Alice's husband," continued Mr. Clark, "and it's for her sake, not yours, that I'm doin' this. Givin' you the chance. You're too respectable, Ed, that's what's the matter with you. Too respectable! I dunno' as how it 'ud be doin' myself any good if you did come into the store. It takes brains to sell goods, an' from what I know of you it's brains that you ain't got. Anyways, the offer's still open."

"It needn't be," said Mr. Dickson, "so far as I'm concerned."

"I'm goin' south to San Diego tomorrow night by the Santa Fé," said Mr. Clark stolidly. "You don't have to decide till lunch-time. Call me up at the hotel. See! An' if you've any sense left in yer head, you'll come. For from the looks of things you're liable to starve in San Francisco. An' if—if you don't make good in the store, Ed, you can drive the delivery wagon an' solicit orders. That's easy work, though——"

"That's enough," said Mr. Dickson. "Quite enough."

WITHOUT waiting to hear the rest, degraded that such an offer should have come to him, he left the room. In the hall he paused and, holding on to the banisters, began to cough. Then when the paroxysm was spent, very slowly and wearily, as if moving by some power other than his own, he climbed the stairs to his wife's bedroom.

He knocked timidly at the door and entered.

"Alice," he said tiptoeing to the side of the bed, "Alice, old girl, how are you? A little better, hey?" He stopped.

She shook her head.

"No," she whispered. "It hurts, Ed. So much." He stroked her hand and the tears ran down her thin cheeks. "When will it stop, Ed? I'm so tired. So tired."

Mr. Dickson felt strangely weak and helpless.

"You'll be better soon, dear," he muttered, trying to comfort her.

"Better!" she whispered. "Better! I don't think I'll ever be better again. It's hard on me to have to lie here day after day and do nothing to help. Gordon's ill, too. Baby's been coughing all day. And here am I in bed crippled with rheumatism—It's hard, Ed."

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"Poor old girl!" he said. "But you'll be better soon, I know."

"Better! So *you* say." Her fingers plucked feebly at the quilt. "You keep saying it, but it's not true. I'll never be better again. You know it, the doctor knows it, every one. I'm just dragging on from day to day. I wish I was dead now. I do so. I'd be saving you money."

"You're not to say things like that," said Mr. Dickson miserably. "You mustn't, Alice, really you mustn't. It's not giving yourself a chance. Why don't you have a little faith?"

The sick woman raised herself on one elbow and fell back again on to the pillow.

"Faith! I'm sick and tired of hearing about faith. I've had faith till I'm sick of it. What good's faith going to do? I knew all along having faith wouldn't help me any, and it didn't. How would *you* like to lie here, suffering like I suffer? You wouldn't, would you? You think I'm grumbling, don't you? You needn't say no; you do.

"If I was out of the way, things would be easier for you and the children. Yes, that's it. Of course. I knew it. Well, you'll be satisfied soon. I won't last much longer. I'm going. I know that I am, and the sooner the better. I'm a drag on you. I always have been, haven't I? You never have considered my feelings, never. You've never been ill! You don't know what it's like to know that you've something wrong with you! I think you're very unkind."

Mr. Dickson, his mind a whirl, bewildered by the injustice of life, sat with his elbows on his knees, his chin resting on his knuckles.

It ws hard on her, but—was it not hard on him?

"Alice," he said, "I lost my job today."

He did not know quite why he told her, save that he felt that he too had some claim on sympathy. He waited.

"What!" she whispered. "You lost——"

She turned over with her face to the wall and began to sob brokenly. Mrs. Parrish came into the room like an avenging fury.

"You fool!" she said. "Get out of here at once. What have you been saying to her? Making her cry! Get along out, or I'll——"

Mr. Dickson crept out of the room. The door closed behind him and he waited on the landing hoping to hear his wife's voice calling him back. Only a confused murmur reached his ears. He laughed bitterly. This then was the end of everything.

He seated himself at the foot of the stairs and thought. Without him she might have some hope of happiness. Was he any use at all in the world—to any one? They all hated him. Even the children. And he was a sick man. If his wife were well, he would still be a drag on her. Life offered no hope. Death itself would be preferable.

Why live? He puzzled his brain for an answer. Because he had his family to provide for. And how was he going to provide? He had no money, no prospects, nothing to offer them. Not even health. Why injure them by living? Why try? He felt in his heart that they would be well rid of one so useless.

He saw in his mind the future. The picture frightened him. Was he to live forever as he was then? A failure, abused by his wife's mother, with four small children, with his wife an invalid, in need of comforts he could not buy and hating him for what he was. Was life worth living? He would be better dead, a thousand times. And if he were to die—if——

He pressed his fists into his thin cheeks and stared across the hall at the hat-rack and the ground-glass of the front door.

What money had he to leave behind? None at all. It would be a coward's act to die now, for that reason alone. Then there flashed into his mind the memory of an accident insurance policy, purchased in the Spring. A grim smile crossed his lips. Mrs. Parrish had called it wasteful extravagance.

They had argued about it. If he were to die in some accident his next of kin, those who depended on him, would receive the insurance money, thousands of dollars. A fortune. They would be rich. But it must be an accident, or what would pass for an accident. If he were careful, might he not manage? He had always spoken with horror of the man who took refuge from his troubles in suicide. But that was before he understood. His own case was different. By dying he would provide for those he loved. If he lived they would starve. If he died they would be rich. Why live?

Mrs. Parrish came to the head of the stairs and gazed down on her son-in-law huddled beneath her with his head bent and his hands clasped about his knees.

"Ed, the baby's crying. Can't you go and

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see what's wrong without being told? S'pose you'll say you're tired! It's a pity about you, isn't it? Born tired, I guess. Get up, man, and help for once in your life!"

Mr. Dickson rose to his feet very slowly and deliberately.

"I'm going out," he said. "Have to."

WITHOUT another word, with no last good-by, hiding his agony of mind under an outward mask of indifference, the little man took down his hat and let himself out of the front door into the dusk.

At the foot of the street he turned and looked for the last time at his home.

Perhaps in the morning they would be sorry. But would they? Not when they knew that he had left them a fortune! Not they!

A street-car bound for the ferry stopped opposite where he stood and he climbed on board. Dropping into a seat he gave himself up to the bitterness of his thoughts. It was a satisfaction that he had decided on his course of action. Was it, though? He pondered. Yes, he was entirely and completely satisfied that he took the right course. There was no other way.

He glanced at the people in the car; a stout lady at whose side he was sitting, proud in her black satin and befeathered hat; a little man opposite, reading a newspaper, a gray-bearded little man, such as he himself might have been in another fifteen years, had life treated him more kindly; a tall girl, fair-haired, slender and very beautiful, probably the daughter of the gray-bearded little man next her; a pale, earnest young man in an ill-fitting suit of black sitting with a serious, demure-looking girl in gray, and from time to time touching her gently on the hand and gazing at her from the corners of his eyes; lovers, of course. And so on.

Mr. Dickson studied them as one to whom his fellow men presented points of strange interest. They were happy, all of them. They had their lives to live. What would they say if they could even guess the nature of the thoughts ebbing and flowing through his mind?

That night he would die. How? He frowned and wrinkled his forehead. He must make his plans quickly. An accident. What kind of an accident? He pursed up his lips. He could be run over. Or he could miss his footing on the step of the car in getting off and fall. But would he be killed? Not of necessity. The accident might not be fatal.

Another point presented itself. If he were to die, a passenger on some public conveyance—the terms of his policy came back to him—if he were to die, a passenger on some public conveyance, a street-car, a train or a steamer, then the compensation was doubled. Fifteen thousand dollars would be better than seven thousand five hundred.

Supposing he were to call up his house and say that a sudden message from a friend would take him across the Bay to Oakland, and supposing—here Mr. Dickson gave a chuckle that caused the lady in black satin to eye him doubtfully—supposing that when he were talking to some casual acquaintance his hat were to be blown over the side, might he not in attempting to grab it fall into the water? And then—then there would be another drowning fatality in the Bay of San Francisco, and more letters to the papers on the slowness and inefficiency of the ferry-boat crews in lowering their boats.

His scheme was perfect. A master scheme without a flaw. And fifteen thousand dollars would to some extent assuage his family's sorrows. Sorrows! Miserable as he was, Mr. Dickson yielded to his laughter.

"Powell Street," said the conductor.

The lady in black satin rose to her feet and Mr. Dickson followed her example.

One street was as good as another; also he had no need to hurry. He would have something to eat, and then walk to the ferry building.

He stood on the edge of the curb, jealously watching the crowds that eddied past his corner. A great loneliness, a curious longing for sympathy, possessed him. A few friendly words, the sight of one friendly face even, would, he knew, help to make the end less hard.

TWO men wandered slowly toward him from the direction of Union Square, laughing and talking.

Mr. Dickson gazed at them moodily. And then a wild joy surged over him. He adjusted his glasses more firmly on his narrow nose and advanced, smiling.

"Why, it's Ed! Ed Dickson." A huge hand descending from on high grabbed his

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shoulder. "What you doing out this time of the night, hey? And all by your little self, hey?"

"Oh! I dunno'." Mr. Dickson spoke with an affectation of carelessness. "Going over to Oakland to see a friend on—on business." Try as he might he could not keep the tremor from his voice. "I never —never knew you were home, Henry."

"Ed!" Mr. Henry Mears, a stout, wide man, with the appearance of an overgrown and bloated cherub, chuckled. "Ed, I dunno' as I like you bein' by yourself so late at night. What kind of a friend, hey?"

Mr. Dickson reddened. There were some things about Mr. Mears, a lack of breeding perhaps, a certain want of refinement, possibly, that jarred. A good chap, undoubtedly, but common. Not a gentleman of course.

"A friend," he said rather coldly. "Just a friend."

Mr. Mears, still holding the little man's shoulder, turned to his companion, who was built after the same pattern, only a size smaller.

"Elmer, shake hands with Mr. Dickson. Mr. Edward Dickson, of Wallace, Matthews & Green, which is how I first had the pleasure of meetin' him. Ed, this is my friend Mr. Brady, from Los Angeles. And you're not goin' to Oakland. Not yet, anyways. I've an idea you're sufferin' from an overdose of your own society. I think—I think——" He eyed the little man with a curious smile. "Elmer," he said, "we was wishin' some one could join us this evening, wasn't we? All right, then! This is him. Ed, you're goin' to spend the evenin' with Mr. Brady an' me."

"Sure," said Mr. Brady. "Mr. Dickson, you'll be doin' Henry an' me a service by bein' our guest, an' we'll start in right now by having a bite to eat. You ain't dined yet, have you?"

"No," said Mr. Dickson, "but——" His brain was in a tumult. To accept the invitation was out of the question. "Henry, I can't. I've got to get over to Oakland this evening to see a man—a man about some property. A mortgage."

He faltered, feeling that he was plunging deep into a morass of lies. He must be careful to avoid arousing suspicion.

Mr. Mears shook his head and winked solemnly.

"Ed, it won't hurt you any to eat with me an' Elmer. After that you can go to yer old Oakland. Though what you want to run off there for at this hour of the day beats me!"

"All right," said Mr. Dickson weakly. "All right. I'll come. And it's—it's very kind of you, Henry. It is indeed." He breathed hard and wiped his moist brow with his handkerchief. "But—but Henry, I can't be with you very long. I may go just as soon as I want to, mayn't I?"

"You betcher life," said Mr. Mears. And on these conditions Mr. Dickson gave his consent.

Afterward he found that the dinner had left no clear impression upon his tired brain. He had vague, confused memories of dazzling lights and mirrors, of white tablecloths and glittering silver, of obsequious waiters who stood bowing at his elbow, of laughter and the chatter of voices, of popping corks and foaming, golden liquid in his glass, of palm-trees and music, of women beautifully gowned who smiled at him and his companions, and of Mr. Brady and Mr. Mears, looming large over everything, eating and drinking hugely, shouting with laughter and enjoying life.

The dinner may have been a success, it may not. Mr. Dickson did not know, nor did he care. Why take the trouble to eat, when he had to die? On the other hand, why die hungry?

He ate what was set before him mechanically, disregarding his dyspepsia, throwing aside his rules of diet. He talked, for at times he heard his own voice, as at a distance; also he laughed out of mere bravado as men on the scaffold have laughed. And whatever may have been his outward appearance, however free from care he may have looked to his companions, his heart was heavy within him.

When in the midst of gaiety and happiness he thought of what life had meant to him, of those for whom he had slaved, and yet who could turn against him in the hour of his misfortune, a lump rose to his throat and choked him. He would be glad when it was over. He was tired and wanted to rest, but the only resting-place for him would be the grave.

Mr. Mears lit a cigar and looked at his watch. Mr. Dickson eyed him moodily. The time was near at hand when he could tear himself away on his mission to Oakland.

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"Ed." Some one was speaking to him.

"Yes," he said, stifling a desire to cough. "What?"

Mr. Mears leaned forward.

"Ed, if you're through, we'd better be goin'! There's nothin' else you want, is there?"

Mr. Dickson shook his head.

"No, thank you, Henry. Nothing at all." He sighed and bunched up his napkin on the table. He had finished his last meal on earth.

"But," said Mr. Mears, and once again he smiled at Mr. Brady. "But, you're not to run off to Oakland, Ed. You're goin' to spend the rest of the evenin' with me an' Elmer. Oakland will keep till tomorrer. Or later on tonight. There'll be time enough after it's all over."

"Surest thing you know," said Mr. Brady. "You can't duck out now, Mr. Dickson."

The little man sighed. Things were being made harder. He would have to be firm and tear himself off at once. They didn't understand of course. Poor fools!

"Boys," he began. "I'm just awfully obliged to you, but——"

Mr. Mears laughed a jolly, full-throated laugh, the laugh of a man who has dined well and is pleased with himself. He nudged Mr. Brady in the ribs.

"Elmer, we're goin' to take Mr. Dickson with us, ain't we?" His face wore an expression that was almost sad. "Ed, you're not wantin' to spoil the evenin' for us, are you? We've had a good time so far, ain't we? I never seen you so lively before."

"An' we got the tickets, too. For three," said Mr. Brady.

"Good seats, Ed," said Mr. Mears.

"Third row."

"You couldn't miss a single point of the in-fightin' if you tried."

"You've just got to come."

"But," said Mr. Dickson helplessly, "I can't. I must go to Oakland. It's important."

"Forget it! There ain't a thing that won't keep till the mornin'."

"I can't say I'm extra stuck on a theater, boys. I'm feeling——"

"What!" Mr. Mears threw back his head and roared. "Ho! ho! ho! Elmer, just listen to him. Listen. A theater. Who said anything about a theater! We're goin' to see a fight."

Mr. Dickson shivered.

"What's that! A—a fight! You mean boxing?"

"Boxin'!" said Mr. Mears signaling to the waiter. "Uh course I mean boxin'. An' you're coming with us."

"I won't," said Mr. Dickson, taking refuge in weak anger. "I've never been to a prize-fight yet, and I've no intention of beginning now. I—I don't approve of fighting. So there!"

"Aw! Come on, Ed. It 'ull do you good. If you ain't never seen a fight, it's time you did."

"I can't," quavered Mr. Dickson. "Henry, I just can't. I don't feel any too well, either."

Mr. Mears, a gloom spread over his round pink face, stared at him with solemn baby eyes.

"If you insist, Ed, if you really inist, old man, we can't stop you. Only—only, what's got you? You an' I ain't never been out together before. See here, tell us, old man; tell me an' Elmer about that visit to Oakland. What's making you start off like this, this hour? It can't be anything as important as all that, can it?"

And at this a dread of discovery gripped Mr. Dickson. His determination wavered. He could have cried in sheer vexation. There was no other course open but to do as he was asked. Otherwise, there would be questions that he could not answer.

He had never seen a fight, nor did he want to. Boxing, as gleaned from books and papers, had always seemed to him to bring out the worst instincts in human nature. All fighters were brutal, but little removed from animals. Those who encouraged them by their presence were as bad. The very thought of being forced to see two men pounding each other with their fists sickened him.

"Well," said Mr. Mears. "What do you say, Ed?"

"A fight!" he said. "I've never seen a fight, Henry. Never. Need I?"

But the appeal fell on deaf ears. Mr. Mears seized his opportunity with both hands.

"Waiter, got that check yet? We're in a hurry."

And so Mr. Dickson who later on in the night would put an end to himself for the sake of his loved ones was persuaded much against his wishes to break the tradition of a lifetime.

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A TAXI bore them smoothly and swiftly through the warm October darkness, away from the stores and theaters and cafés, past vacant lots with twisted iron-work and piled-up bricks, relics of the fire, across Van Ness Avenue, on through a region of quiet rows of houses, beneath glittering lights of Phillmore Street, to a large building around the doors of which were gathered crowds of men and boys.

"We're here," said Mr. Mears. "Come along, boys, we ain't got too much time. They'll just be about through with the preliminaries."

As they passed along a wide hall they met a little procession of men in sweaters, men who talked in loud, angry voices and carried between them a white-faced youngster whose arms dangled limply.

"How'd he get his, Larry?" inquired Mr. Mears.

"Get it! Yah! He didn't get it, Mr. Mears. A foul, dat's what it was. Dat bum what's refereein' has de noive to say he's out when he's down on de boards wit' a punch in de groin. Dat gink 'ull get a poke in de lamps some night dat 'ull make him see straight."

Mr. Mears nodded in sympathy and passed on.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Dickson, plucking at his friend's sleeve. "What's it all mean? I don't like it."

"One of the preliminaries. Knock-out! His seconds say it's a foul. They would, uh course. Say, we're just in time, Elmer. Come on, Ed. Don't you slip off now, or there'll be trouble."

Not until Mr. Dickson, feeling very conspicuous and out of place and more miserable than he had imagined possible, was seated between his two companions did he summon up courage to take stock of his surroundings.

"Big crowd," said Mr. Brady, "ain't there?"

"You bet," said Mr. Mears.

Mr. Dickson letting his spectacled eyes wander drearily about the galleried rink was conscious of many faces, seen in a blur of tobacco smoke, a hoarse roar of voices, booming and reëchoing from the hollows of the roof, faces and yet more faces, on every side, the striking of matches, strong lights overhead blazing down on the raised platform, the ring, as he knew without Mr. Brady's whispered help, with its padded corner-posts and double ropes and chairs in opposite corners.

"You can see all right, Ed, can't you?" said Mr. Mears. "Say, Elmer, this is great, ain't it?"

"You're durn right," said Mr. Brady. "Ain't seen a fight for I dunno' how long, not since last Fourth of July at Reno, when Jeffries tried to come back an' couldn't."

"Was you there?" said a long-nosed gentleman sitting behind him. "I had it from a friend of mine, intimate friend he is an' knows Jeffries down in Los, he says that when they took the ring——"

The drone of conversation rose to a sudden roar.

"Here they are," said Mr. Mears. "Look! It's Charlie—no, it ain't. It's Bunnie Smith. See!"

Mr. Dickson huddled in his chair with his arms folded and his chin sunken on his chest, a prey to the profoundest gloom, roused himself to look.

A FAIR-HAIRED young man of medium height, wrapped in a bath-robe of some flaming red stuff and paying no heed to the cheers that greeted him, was making his way slowly toward the stage, followed by three men in sweaters.

Mr. Dickson found himself watching the fair-haired young man with a certain languid interest. This, then, was one of the fighters. Somehow he had expected that fighting men were bigger, more brutal in appearance, with the marks of their trade imprinted on their features. This man was good-looking, pleasant and kind-hearted obviously, and a mere boy in years. And yet a fighter! A fighter who earned his living by battering his fellow men.

"Bunnie Smith," shouted Mr. Mears in his ear. "See him! Oh, you Bunnie!" And to Mr. Dickson again as the boxer climbed into the ring: "Local lad. Great scrapper. You watch his foot-work. You won't see better nowhere. He's a pippin. He'll whip 'em all in a year or two, you mark my words. Lightweight, uh course." He turned in his chair as another shout of welcome went up from the crowded house.

Mr. Dickson craning his thin neck saw above the heads of those seated near him the man whom Bunnie Smith would fight. And he knew in that moment that his

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preconceived notions of what boxers were had not been altogether wrong.

"That's Charlie Brown," said Mr. Mears in his ear. "He's a Londoner. Dunno' what he's like really, but the fight can't last any longer than four or five rounds anyway."

Mr. Dickson nodded, not in the least interested.

The Englishman was smaller than his opponent by some inches, but broader in the shoulders, and as he stood in the ring talking to his three seconds who were examining the gloves Mr. Dickson noticed with surprise that his arms reached nearly to his knees. Like a large ape's, he thought. And it came over him then that there were other ways in which the small Englishman resembled the ape. His lower jaw projected, his nose was flat and broad, his mouth big; when he smiled, which he did often, his teeth showed like tusks, his neck was thick, and his head covered with closely cropped black hair.

Mr. Dickson felt a thrill of disgust pass through him. Here was the typical fighter of his imagination: the brute man, muscle and brawn, but no brain. A man born to fight. What chance could the lad in the opposite corner of the ring, laughing easily as the gloves were fitted on to his hands, have with such a man! The one was a fighting animal; the other, a human being, who if the face were any index to the mind fought for the sheer joy of victory, sensitive, highly strung, nervous, charged with a thousand feelings that the other could never know. It was murder, surely.

"He hasn't a chance, has he?" he whispered.

"Oh, yes!" said Mr. Mears. "He's not such a mutt as all that. But Bunnie Smith'ull do what he likes with him. You see if he don't."

"Bunnie Smith. Why," said Mr. Dickson. "You don't mean to tell me that—I meant the other one, the man with the black hair. What did you say his name was? Charlie Brown. He'll win, won't he?" Mr. Mears shouted.

"Win? Not in a thousand years. He's not got a dog's chance, that little English guy ain't. You watch, Ed. You're goin' to see one of the dandiest lickin's given a man of his weight you ever saw. Four rounds Charlie'll last, if Bunnie lets him. Not more."

Mr. Dickson was very glad. That the American boy should win seemed to him only right. He disliked the looks of the Englishman exceedingly. The sooner he was beaten the better pleased he would be.

He heard dreamily the brief announcement that the contest was for twenty rounds and that the fighters were Bunnie Smith of San Francisco and Charlie Brown of Lambeth; wondered for a brief space where was Lambeth and why Charlie Brown had traveled to San Francisco; saw the lights reflecting on the clear, white bodies of the two men, and realized with a sudden shock that he was about to waste his last hours on earth in watching two half-naked boxers smash each other senseless for money.

A stout, heavily built man in his shirt sleeves, standing in the ring, spoke to the little Englishman and in answer to some question shook his head.

"That's the referee," said Mr. Mears. "See! They're ready now. Look!"

"Seconds out!" The men in sweaters climbed out between the ropes on to the floor.

"Time!" And in a hushed silence the two boxers leaped to their feet and advancing to the center of the ring grabbed at each other's gloved hands and turned swiftly.

MR. DICKSON'S heart gave an upward leap as the two men circled around, eying each other warily, to all appearance making no attempt to close. The American, fair-haired, slim, built like a statue of some Greek god, was very serious, his eyes cold and hard, his lips pressed tightly together. The Englishman, crouching somewhat, with his hands before his face, was grinning, showing his teeth and—so it seemed to Mr. Dickson—whispering to his opponent, daring him to come to close quarters.

"Cut out the dancin'!" shouted a voice. "Fight!"

"Look at his footwork, will you!" said Mr. Mears. "Look at it! A-ah!"

He drew in his breath noisily as Bunnie Smith, ducking his head under the Englishman's arms, darted in and with quick, half-arm hooks drove him against the ropes. As he rebounded, he met him with a crashing drive on the chin and the crowd yelled.

"That's the boy!" said Mr. Mears.

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That's it You've got him, Bunnie! You've got him!"

The Englishman, still smiling, shook his head and advanced cautiously. Quick as a flash the other was on him, hitting with both hands. There was a brief scufflle, the *thud—thud—thud* of blows landing on bare flesh, a gasp, and Charlie Brown reeled and fell. The crowd rose in a roar of excitement as the Englishman rolled over on to his face.

"Get back, Smith!" said the referee. "You hear me! Right back."

Mr. Dickson held his breath, his pulses tingling.

"What is it?" he said. "Hey? What happened?"

Charlie Brown was on his feet once more, with the same grin on his lips and a smear of blood on his cheek. Without waiting he went in, slugging with all his strength. Bunnie Smith, as serious as if defeat stared him in the face, stepped to one side, flicked him on the ear, backed a little, moving as if dancing, and then once more diving under the swinging arms rested his head on the other's chest.

"Break away!" said the referee. "Break away there!" And they flung each other off angrily.

One of the seconds clapped his hands.

"Go to it, Bunnie! Now's yer time!" And Bunnie Smith rushed, hitting viciously.

The Englishman gave way. A hard drive reached his body; he doubled up with his gloves over his face; a jab on the neck sent him down in a limp heap.

"He's out!" yelled Mr. Mears. "Out! Out!"

"No, he ain't," said Mr. Brady. "There's the gong."

Dazed and frightened, yet strangely fascinated by what he saw, forgetting for a brief spell his own sorrows, Mr. Dickson watched the seconds clamber into the ring and drag the little Englishman to his corner. One thrust a chair under him and set his arms outstretched upon the ropes; another sponged his face; the third flapped him with a towel.

"He's no good! No good!" chanted Mr. Mears. "Won't last another round."

"What do you know about that?" said Mr. Brady. "Putting a boob like that into the ring! Bunnie Smith will kill him."

"Yes!" said the long-nosed man behind. "Yes! You're dead right. My, wasn't that a punch! He's no good."

"Why don't yuh go home?" shouted another. "Just like his darned nerve to think he can fight!"

"Fight! He couldn't fight a roller towel. Yah! What you want's a few lessons in boxin'."

"Hey, you Johnny Bull! Don't you English know nothin' at all about fightin'? Ought to by this time, all the lickin's we've given yuh!"

"You ain't knockin' your missus about now, are yuh? You'd wollop the life outer her, wouldn't you? Hey? Stand up an get licked!"

"Don't be a quitter whatever you are!"

Mr. Dickson heard the storm of jeers and ribald laughter with a feeling akin to shame. Unused though he might be to the manners and customs of the ring he yet knew that they were mocking a man who must soon be beaten. It seemed unfair. Charlie Brown would last perhaps another round, if that. To all intents he was already out. And they laughed at him! Poor devil! Even a fighter, a brute man such as he was, might have his pride.

Mr. Mears was speaking.

"What's that?" he said.

"I was saying," said Mr. Mears, "that it's a punk sort of fight that we brought yuh to."

"That's all right," said Mr. Dickson.

"No, it ain't. The Britisher won't last the second round. Bunnie Smith can hit him when he likes and where he likes."

Once more the two half-naked men were in the ring circling around with quick, pattering footsteps. The Englishman grinned and showed no signs of the punishment he had taken save a puffiness under the eyes.

"Fight!" said Mr. Mears. "Go on, fight, an' git it over!"

As if in answer to his words Bunnie Smith led with his right. The Englishman ducked and swung savagely but the blow missed by half a foot. Bunnie Smith was in the center of the ring and the crowd howled. The black-haired man followed after him, his eyes full of doubt, but his lips set in the same steady grin.

It seemed to Mr. Dickson sitting open-mouthed in the third row that Bunnie Smith was playing with him. He kept dancing away on tiptoe, occasionally jabbing at the other's face, avoiding his heavy swings unconcernedly. Once caught in a

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corner he fell on his neck, clung there till the referee hauled him off, and was safe.

And then, as the Englishman, still the attacker, reached his cheek with a half-hearted drive, he lashed out, right, left, right, left, on the chest and ribs, stepped to one side to avoid another rush, and turning drove his right hard under the ear. The Englishman reeled and half fell over the ropes. Up again, he met the furious onslaught of the Californian stubbornly. Another jab on the chin and a hook in the body brought him to his hands and knees.

Bunnie Smith, his gloves resting on his hips, stared at him almost with contempt as he struggled to his feet. Then he was on him once more, hitting mechanically. Charlie Brown gave way, blocking the blows; then unable to escape clutched him in his arms. His back was toward Mr. Dickson but he could see the other's fists jabbing him in the back as they struggled against the ropes. They broke apart, the Englishman staggered back, took a crashing left-hand drive in the face and fell.

"Look!" said Mr. Mears. "Look! he's out."

MR. DICKSON heard the seconds being slowly counted off. At eight Charlie Brown was up once more. Bunnie Smith very deliberately advanced on him. He waited, almost as if considering where to hit, and then with a flickering motion of his arms drove his right into the Englishman's body. He grunted wearily but did not fall. His strength seemed to have left him. His head lolled forward helplessly; his eyes were half closed; blood was on his face and chest. Mr. Dickson shuddered and looked away.

Then the gong sounded once more, and once more the audience howled its delight.

When Mr. Dickson raised his head, the seconds were in the ring and Charlie Brown was stretched limply in his chair, to all appearance unconscious of what went on.

"Ain't that a miracle?" said Mr. Brady.

"How?" said Mr. Dickson. "How's that?"

"Why, it's the third round now, an' he ain't out."

"He will be, though, soon as ever he leaves his corner," said Mr. Mears. "He can't keep his feet."

"Ain't he the biggest dub you ever seen!" said Mr. Brady. "Ain't it the limit a gink like that gettin' up an' tryin' to fight? He deserves what's comin' to him, the swellest lickin' a man ever had."

And Mr. Dickson, listening to these remarks, still feeling that they were overhard on one who did his best, awaited the next round, knowing now that the end was not far off.

The spectators began to shout directly the two boxers left their corners.

"Get it over, Bunnie! Give the stiff all he's askin' for! Knock him out, an' get it over quick! In the cellar, Bunnie! In the cellar! Kill him! Kill him!"

So, thought Mr. Dickson, might the populace of ancient Rome have chanted advice and praise to a favorite gladiator. They craved for blood, blood and more blood. The little Englishman would be beaten; no miracle could save him. Why could they not hold their tongues? Mr. Dickson was glad that Bunnie Smith was winning; he looked so clean and strong and clever, the very opposite to the tired, thick-set, blood-stained man who faced him at the call of time.

It seemed only a matter of seconds. The Californian, keeping on in the same old way, went in to win. Under a hail of blows the Englishman wavered, staggered back, bent his head and at last rushed, hitting blindly, took a punch on the heart that sent him reeling against the ropes and dropped.

He was on his feet again almost directly, his teeth showing in a lop-sided grin. Bunnie Smith was at him at once, a little frown creasing his forehead, but the Englishman blocked his swings and they clinched. To Mr. Dickson it seemed impossible. The round was half over and they were still fighting. Why didn't the man give in? He couldn't win. His face was a mask of blood, horrible to look at. One of his eyes was almost closed, his breath came in deep gasps, and yet he was on his feet, giving blow for blow.

Bunnie Smith, bleeding himself now with a trickle of blood from his nose, and his smooth, white flesh covered with the red from the other's gloves, had him wedged into a corner, slamming in savage half-arm hooks, left and right, left and right, like a machine.

Mr. Dickson's teeth pressed convulsively into his lower lip. It was murder! Why didn't he quit? He was beaten. No one could blame him if he gave up. He had done his best; no man could have done

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more. It was not his fault that the American was the better man. How could it be? Why didn't they stop the fight?

Huddled against the ropes the little Englishman fought on grimly and at the sound of the gong was still fighting. The Californian gave a shrug almost of despair as he turned and walked to his corner.

"Good boy, Bunnie!" yelled Mr. Mears. "It's bed time, an' you'll put him to sleep in a minute or two, won't yuh?"

"Funny, ain't it?" said Mr. Brady. "A piker like that lastin' out to the fourth round! They shouldn't oughter 'uv put him into the same ring with Bunnie Smith, all the same! It's like killin' tame rats with a stick."

"What a lickin'!" said Mr. Mears. "Serves him durn' well right for goin' into the ring at all. Say, Ed, hope you're enjoyin' yerself. It ain't much of a fight, uh course, but it passes the time, don't it?"

Mr. Dickson nodded without speaking. A sudden revulsion of feeling had come over him. From the depths of his whole being he pitied the man who was fighting a losing fight. The small, black-haired Englishman had no chance of winning. Yet he fought on. Why? Mr. Dickson pondered.

What was the good of it? He would gain nothing, not even money, by continuing to fight. What grim determination kept him in the ring? What was the underlying reason that forced him to his feet before the call of the tenth second? It was all a mystery to Mr. Dickson. Had the man a chance he might have understood. And what of his inner feelings? Did he not know by instinct that the sympathies of that vast audience were against him—that the men who shouted and laughed each time he fell were enjoying the sight of his defeat?

MR. DICKSON, hater of fighting and fighting men, felt a glow of unwilling admiration stealing over him. Brutal perhaps, degrading even, and yet there was something heroic about a man who could take such punishment and fight doggedly on. Every one was against the Englishman. Even his own seconds seemed to have a curious contempt for his efforts. He was without friends, a stranger in a strange land, doing his best and failing.

And Mr. Dickson once more remembered his own sorrows. He, also, was without hope in *his* fight. He also was beaten. He and the small Englishman were being overwhelmed by forces too strong to combat. And from the moment he realized that truth, Mr. Dickson found himself looking upon Charlie Brown of Lambeth as a friend. He had it in his heart to envy the big man in the gray sweater who stood with his legs apart swinging a towel or the smaller man in the red and black striped jersey who rubbed the Englishman's tired arms. They, at least, could help. But—but——

And this is what still puzzled Mr. Dickson. Why did he not give in? Why did he not recognize that it was hopeless to fight? If it were honor that he fought for, surely honor were satisfied by what he had already done!

"He's plucky," said Mr. Dickson as the seconds climbed out of the ring. "Isn't he?"

"Who's that?" said Mr. Mears. "Charlie Brown! Oh, sure, he's plucky all right, all right. But he's goin' to get one awful thrashin' if he don't lie down this round. Now then, Bunnie, let's have it! Put him out, boy! Put him out!"

As were the three preceding rounds, so was this. Bunnie Smith, showing by his manner that he was growing angry at the resistance that he met, fought savagely. Charlie Brown backed away from him, crouching, with his gloves shielding his bruised face.

"That's it!" said Mr. Mears. "See, Ed! Bunnie's tryin' all he knows for the knockout."

Mr. Dickson felt a wild desire to shout encouragement to Charlie Brown as he reeled back from a fierce swing on the cheekbone. He went down twice in quick succession, and each time it seemed impossible for him to rise unaided. The crowd yelled to the Californian to finish the fight, but to Mr. Dickson's mind his expression indicated a growing doubt. The Englishman's breath came in great sobs as he was beaten back, yet he went forward again smiling. Once he lashed out and Bunnie Smith's head was jerked back, but he followed up too slowly and the spectators howled as he was rushed to the ropes.

Time found him on his feet, standing wearily in his own corner, with Bunnie Smith in the center of the ring glaring at him.

Mr. Mears laughed.

"He's not out yet. Ain't he a wonder?"

"Yes—but why doesn't he give in, hey?"

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Mr. Dickson nodded. "That's what I don't understand!" And Mr. Mears chuckled.

Round followed round and yet the fight went on. Each time the seconds crawled through the ropes Mr. Dickson would find himself repeating in a whisper:

"It can't last. It can't."

But when the gong ended the round the Englishman would still be fighting. At any instant the end might come. Flesh and blood could not stand up against the punishment he suffered. And always when he sank back into his chair Mr. Dickson would shiver at the look in his face; grim fury, the realization of defeat, a sullen determination to fight on. But in the ring, as if urged by some inner force, his lips were still set in the same twisted smile. Nothing changed that. Not even when he gripped the ropes and hauled himself to his feet to save the count.

It was brutal of course—no fit sport for decent men, so Mr. Dickson told himself. And yet—yet—there was even for him a strange fascination in the sight of the bare bodies, glistening with sweat, red with blood, in the patter of feet, in the *thud, thud* of heavy blows, in the shouts of those who watched the fighters.

"Will he never quit?"

"Quit!" said Mr. Mears. "Not he! He's not the kind that quits. Ain't got brain enough to be a boxer, but he's no quitter." He shouted. "What's the matter, Bunnie? Gettin' tired? Can't you put him out?"

Mr. Dickson shuddered. Why couldn't they stop him? Why didn't the referee give the fight to the man who had won it in the third round? Bunnie Smith was the better man of the two. It was all so cruel, so needlessly cruel, and brutal. Like—like—his mind searched for a simile—like life itself. Life was cruel, and so was this fight; sport so called.

In the fourteenth round the Englishman was down three times, and each time it was harder for him to gain his feet. Mr. Dickson prayed for the knock-out to end his agony. It hurt to watch the dumb suffering in the battered face, to see the efforts with which the coarse, swollen lips kept smiling.

The end was very near, he knew, and yet with a mild wonder, being ignorant of what others had been expecting, he saw that Bunnie Smith, his fellow countryman, was holding back. He seemed slow and sluggish in his movements, his blows lacked sting. No longer did he dart in and out again, almost too swift for the eye to follow. He was unsteady on his feet, careless, uncertain in his judge of distance.

Mr. Dickson was puzzled. Had he too a lurking pity for the man he fought? His smooth body showed few signs of punishment; one purpling bruise marred the whiteness of his skin; his lips were cut; there was a red mark on his cheek. Only the quick rise and fall of his ribs showed that he had been fighting for fourteen rounds. What was staying his hand?

Mr. Dickson groaned as the Englishman once more on his feet, stumbled toward his opponent, his arms hanging by his side. Bunnie Smith drew back deliberately. Why didn't he finish it? Mr. Dickson clenched his fists. Why?

And once more the gong broke the suspense and set loose the savage yells from the crowded floor and galleries.

"Why don't he finish it off, hey?" said Mr. Dickson.

Mr. Mears, flushed and enthusiastic, no longer bored, turned to him.

"Bunnie'll do it. He'll do it all right. He had him down three times last round, an' I thought for sure he was down for keeps. But he's tired, Bunnie is. That's what's the matter with him. He's dog tired. He's got to go slow. See! He's resting, just stalling. You wait a round or two. He'll put him to sleep all right, won't he, Elmer?"

"Course he will," said Mr. Brady.

"Oh! I knew that, of course," said Mr. Dickson. "But I wondered when."

Round after round it went on. The two men followed each other slowly to and fro, fighting and holding and waiting. There was a cold anger, almost a fear, something inhuman in the blue eyes of the Californian. He smiled occasionally as if to show that he at least was strong and confident. His opponent smiled, too: a lop-sided, twisted smile that showed a double gap in his teeth.

Mr. Dickson, forgetting the reasons that had brought him away from home, whispered encouragement under his breath. He hated himself for watching, yet with his whole heart he admired the little Englishman.

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GRADUALLY he noticed that a different note had crept into the applause. The spectators had been waiting to see the little Londoner, one of a race that makes few friends, beaten; but a man who though beaten hopelessly round after round could still face his opponent at the call of time earned their respect. By the end of the fifteenth round they were cheering him, and Mr. Dickson listened with a feeling of pride in the man with whom he had in some mysterious way identified his own self.

"Say, it's great!" Mr. Mears had gone over unreservedly in his opinions. "That little guy's the gamest boy that ever stepped into a ring."

"Whew! See that!" Mr. Brady clutched his arm. "What a wollop! Sure as you live he's on his feet."

"He ain't a fighter, but gee! did y'ever see a man with a heart like his? He don't know he's beaten, that's his complaint. He just don't know he's beaten."

As the round came to an end, the seventeenth, the little Englishman was led to his corner and there were shouts of:

"Stop the fight! Referee, make him quit!"

Charlie Brown broke away from his seconds and faced the tumult.

"Stop it! 'E won't stop it! See! I'm fightin,' ain't I? *'Im!* 'E won't put me out, not in a 'undred years, 'e won't. W'y don't 'e do it?" And the crowd cheered.

Mr. Dickson shook his head.

"They shouldn't let him," he whispered. "They shouldn't. What's the use of it, hey?"

"The use!" Mr. Mears, flushed and happy, grinned at the little man at his side. "Why, say, Ed, you're seein' the pluckiest thing you ever heard of! He can't win; but—look at him! He's beat every way, an' he won't own it." He paused. "Say, I take off my hat to that little Britisher every time. He's a white man, he is. There ain't a yeller streak in him."

In the eighteenth round the Englishman could scarcely see to avoid the Californian's rushes. He swayed from side to side, propping him off with his forearm. Blow after blow found his face. He seemed to Mr. Dickson to be made of iron. Bunnie Smith, as if he too were all but out, punched at him wearily. The people were jeering, yelling advice, taunting him.

Mr. Dickson frowned. It was like everything else; cruel, unnecessary. And in spite of the punishment, the small Englishman fought on; scrambling clumsily to his feet, facing the other's fists in the same grim, blind manner, smashed against the ropes, again and again, bleeding and bruised and battered; yet with the smile that his swollen lips had never lost from the beginning of the fight.

Mr. Dickson't heart pounded fiercely against his ribs, there was a singing in his ears, his glasses were dimmed with perspiration.

A white-haired old gentleman in front of him turned to a companion.

"I don't care. It's a massacre, not a fight, but it's the greatest exhibition of pluck I ever saw in my life. There must be some good in a game that will bring out all that in a man, mustn't there? I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

"They ought to stop it," said the other man.

"And break his heart. No. Let him finish."

"It 'ull be over this round," said Mr. Mears. And although he had made this same prophecy before, this time Mr. Dickson believed him.

They met in the middle of the ring. The Californian, slow on his feet by now, put two left jabs in the other's bruised face. The drive which followed missed by the merest shade, and then came the last great rally of the evening—a rally that brought the spectators to their feet in a frenzy of wild excitement.

The little Englishman shook his head and staggered forward as if about to fall. Keeping his left forearm over his face he scrambled after the Californian, hitting clumsily with his right, sound arm, again and again, sobbing each time he swung. Bunnie Smith, shaken by a wild punch in the chin, grunted angrily and with cold scorn gave back. The Englishman limped after him, his blows growing weaker and weaker, until all at once he halted and stood with his head drooping and his arms hanging by sides.

The shouting ceased as Bunnie Smith walked slowly forward. With grave deliberation he drove his left hard into the face. His right he had no occasion to use. In a dead stillness Charlie Brown spun around and crashed down on to his back.

"That does it!" whispered Mr. Mears. "He's out."

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THE little Englishman lay inert and helpless with his hands covering his eyes and his knees bent, while Bunnie Smith, wiping the blood from his lips, stared at him. Twice he tried to rise, twice he fell back limply. The fight was at an end.

As the referee, red-faced and smiling, raised the Californian's arm in the air, a token of his victory, Mr. Dickson sank back in his chair, unnerved by what he had seen.

"The greatest thing I've ever heard tell of," said Mr. Brady.

"A beaten man in the first round," said Mr. Mears, "and in every other round, without a dog's chance uh winnin', an' yet not out till the nineteenth round."

The little Englishman was seated in his corner, with his seconds rubbing his arms and legs and sponging the blood off his face. The Californian came over and took his hand.

"Say, that was some scrap! I'm about all in. Hope you ain't hurt."

Mr. Dickson listened eagerly. Never, never had he imagined that any man could go through what Charlie Brown had and live. What would he say to the man who had smashed him almost to pulp? Would he speak to him at all or what?

The little Cockney fighter laughed.

"Thet's all right, cully. You shook me up once or twice. But Lor' lumme, thet's all right. I like it. Wish I'd got a punch on me you 'ave."

Bunnie Smith left the ring, garbed once more in his red bath-robe, and the crowd cheered him.

"Good boy, Bunnie!" said Mr. Mears. "But you've had the hardest doin' tonight you've ever had."

Charlie Brown stood up.

"Ready?" said one of the seconds. He made as though to lift him.

"Wot are yer pl'yin' at?" said the boxer. "Think I cawn't walk! It's my 'ead wot's ighkin', not my feet."

As the Englishman, still grinning, made his way through the crowd, he was greeted by a roar of cheering that to the mind of Mr. Dickson standing on his chair to watch his progress made amends for what had gone before. They had laughed at him, mocked him, scorned him for even thinking that victory might be his, yet in his defeat they cheered him as they had never cheered the winner.

And what was the meaning of it all? Mr. Dickson still standing on his chair pondered deeply.

What inner force had urged the little Englishman round after round to leave his corner and face the storm of blows? What satisfaction had he, now that it was all over? What was the use of it all?

The old gentleman with the white hair was being helped into his overcoat.

"Worth it!" he was saying. "I wouldn't have missed it for all the gold in Inyo!"

"One of those men who fight as long as they can see, hey?"

"See!" said the old gentleman. "*He* couldn't see! Did you notice his eyes at the finish?"

Mr. Dickson felt tired and a trifle ashamed of himself. He, of all men, to have witnessed a prize-fight! A brutal and degrading exhibition!

A voice broke in on his reflections.

"Well, what's the matter? Not gone to sleep, have you?"

He turned and saw Mr. Mears smiling up at him.

"Come on, Ed! We're goin' down-town for a club sandwich and some Munich. How's that strike you? Pretty good, hey?"

Mr. Dickson descended from his chair. "Downtown! Why——"

"It's too late for Oakland tonight," said Mr. Brady.

"Oakland!" said Mr. Dickson blankly. "Oakland!"

And he remembered then that that very night would end his life. He was a failure, ruined in health, as in pocket, without hope for the future, doomed to death for the sake of those who loved him. Was he man enough to go through with what he had planned?

A numbing sensation stole over him. Everything seemed empty and flat and desolate.

"You're comin,' uh course!" said Mr. Mears.

"No," he said hoarsely. "I'm sorry, but I can't. It's late, and I've got to leave you."

He wanted to be by himself. The atmosphere of the place was stifling him.

When at last they reached the open they stood on the sidewalk talking. Mr. Dickson, hat in hand, drew great drafts of cool air into his lungs. He coughed and pressed his hand to his side. His head ached, there

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was a dull pain over his heart, and his limbs seemed too heavy to be his.

"Let's walk!" said Mr. Mears.

"I think I'll be moving off now," said Mr. Dickson. "It's late, but—but I'm expected over in Oakland, and—they'll be waiting up for me. It's a matter of business. Most important. For a friend." The necessity for hiding his feelings urged him to smile. "A great time," he continued. "Real great. I'm much obliged to you, Henry, for bringing me. Guess I'll take a car to the ferry."

"Well," said Mr. Mears gloomily, "if you will, you will. I'm sorry, Ed, all the same. I'd 'uv liked you to finish the night with me an' Elmer. But, maybe you're right. If you think you oughter, why I won't say nothin' more." He stretched out his hand. "Good-by, Ed. I've enjoyed the pleasure of yer company very much. A great game, fightin', ain't it? That little man fought on when he hadn't a chance—not even of making a draw of it. But he fought on. He wasn't a quitter."

"I wanted Bunnie Smith to win," said Mr. Brady. "That's only natural. He's a San Francisco boy, an' the other guy was a Britisher. All the same—just at the end, I don't mind sayin' if he'd landed a punch that 'ud 'uv put Bunnie out, I'd 'uv yelled my head off."

"Same here," said Mr. Mears. "An' next time any one talks about fightin', Ed, you'll know if he's speakin' the truth, won't you?"

"Yes," said Mr. Dickson. "I'll know."

He shook hands and then waited at the corner until the two big men were lost in the crowd and the darkness.

HE FELT sorry that they had gone, and yet he was glad to be rid of them. Good fellows, both, coarse of fiber, common perhaps and lacking in refinement, but with many good points.

He frowned. Who was he, Edward Dickson, a proven failure, incompetent, weakly, penniless, to criticize such as they were? They were better men than he, at least. Nor were they without ideals. He had discovered that much during the evening. They worshiped courage, the highest quality a man could have. A coward was beyond all hope.

He walked slowly away from the car-track, his shoulders bowed as if by the weight of his troubles. And in spite of his arguments, in spite of what he knew to be the truth, there was even yet at the back of his mind a doubt. Was he after all doing what was right? What of his wife? What would her thoughts be when the news was broken that her husband was drowned? The answer reassured him. What other course was open?

And then he knew that the little Englishman had done a great thing. His desperate effort to stave off defeat had not been useless. He had taught to one man the lesson of courage.

Mr. Dickson moistened his dry lips. He, also, must be brave. Only a coward would turn back now. He must do his duty. And would death be difficult? What had life to offer? He would show that he, too, was brave. To die would be braver than to live.

He halted, his lungs racked by his cough, and walked on as a short, broad-shouldered man in a cap and overcoat with a muffler around his neck came abreast of him.

"Beg pardon, but will this 'ere tyke me to Gowlden Gyte Avenyer?"

Mr. Dickson's heart gave an upward leap. And then by the light of an arc-lamp he recognized the battered, swollen face of Charlie Brown of Lambeth, the man who had lost his fight.

"Yes," he said. "keep right on." A curious determination gripped him. "I beg your pardon, but aren't you Mr. Brown the—the boxer?"

The little man nodded curtly.

"Hif yer calls it boxin.' Yus."

"Then," said Mr. Dickson shyly, "I'd very much like to shake hands with you. I—I never saw a greater exhibition of pluck than I saw tonight." He broke off, frightened by his temerity.

"Thenk yer," said the Englishman, holding out his hand. "Thenk yer kindly, sir. But that weren't nothin', nothin' at all." He seemed almost as shy and embarrassed at Mr. Dickson himself.

"It must—must have hurt, didn't it?" said Mr. Dickson.

The fighter laughed.

"Yus, a bit. But not as much as you'd think." He hesitated. "If you're goin' this w'y, p'r'aps yer wouldn't mind movin' on. It's a trifle cowld awfter bein' in that there ring for nineteen rahnds, an' I'm anious to get in. I 'ad a bit of a doin', come ter think of it! 'Adn't I?"

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Mr. Dickson agreed. He had. He fell into step by his side. He wanted to ask a few questions, to probe into the innermost recesses of his mind. And there was a bond between them. The link that binds brave men.

"Mr. Brown," he said, "what made you keep on fighting? Why didn't you give in, hey?" This square, uneducated, common little man must have within him something that made him different from other men. "It was useless fighting on, wasn't it?"

"Oh! I dunno'."

"You couldn't win, you knew that, didn't you, after the second round?"

"Yus, guv'nor, but you don't understand. I'm no good at boxin', of course. But no one's ever beaten me withaht 'avin' ter go all the w'y, an' then he ighn't sure till I'm actually aht that he's licked me. I wasn't goin' ter lie dahn an' tyke the count same as some blokes would 'ave done. That ighn't my w'y, sir."

"No!" said Mr. Dickson a trifle uncertainly. "But it seemed to me that when you'd done all you could, no one would have thought it wrong of you to—to have given in. You'd have gotten your money just the same, wouldn't you?"

For a few moments they walked on in silence, and then the little boxer gave a low laugh.

"An' 'ad the crahd mykin' fun of me! You don't ketch on, sir. You've got to fight as long as you've eyes in yer 'ead to see with or legs to stand on. It's your bloomin' business. Yer duty; if yer like ter put it that w'y. I couldn't win; p'r'aps not, but then—well, what's the word you're always usin' aht here? Quitter? I ain't a quitter. An' look 'ere, the crahd was agynst me at first, wasn't they? Well, at the end, I 'ad them on my side. See! I didn't quit. If yer stick to it, an' don't give in, well, then, they like yer. They think you're all right. I ain't a quitter. Never 'ave been, an' never will be. Bunnie Smith could w'ip me with one 'and be'ind 'is back, but I myde 'im fight all he knew."

"Do you like it?" asked Mr. Dickson.

"Like it!" The Englishman laughed. "Look at my fyce! 'Ardly yuman, is it? Raw beefstyke, eh? 'Ow would you like to stand up an' be 'it for nineteen rahnds, knowin' you couldn't win, eh? I 'ate it. 'Oo wouldn't? But it's my job. If yer stands up to fight, an' don't do the best you can, well, you're a pretty poor specimen of a man, ain't yer?"

"Then," said Mr. Dickson, "you fought on, because—because you thought it your duty, hey?"

"Yes, sir. You've got it."

"I see," Mr. Dickson nodded. "But—why fight at all?"

"I wants the money. That's why. My missus, she 'ates me fightin', but she'd a darn' sight rather I fought till I 'adn't a fyce left than give up like I was yeller. She's ill. Consumption it is, at 'ome in England.

"I get the loser's end of the purse each time, but it's more than I'd earn any other w'y. An' w'en things is as bad as they can be, w'en I'm gettin' punched all rahnd the ring, an' agynst the ropes, an' everything's gettin' fynt an' dizzy, well, then I just myke myself remember it's for 'er I'm fightin', an' I've got to pull myself together so's to do 'er credit. The only reason I quit tonight was bekorse I couldn't fight no more. 'E's wot you call a bear-cat, that Bunnie. But I—I dunno' w'ether 'e'll myke a real champ. 'E don't seem to 'ave the punch. M'ybe 'e 'as. But—well, 'e ought to 'ave put me aht in under nineteen rahnds, anyw'y."

"And your wife's ill?" said Mr. Dickson slowly.

"Yes, sir. She is. I'd given up the ring, but when things went wrong, why then I just 'ad to do something. That's why I'm aht on the Coast fightin', gettin' knocked aht in nineteen rahnds this w'y. I'm a perishin' failure in the ring, I know. But wot's that matter? Anything's better than bein' a quitter. An' people respect yer when yer fight till yer can't fight no longer, don't they?"

Mr. Dickson nodded.

"This is your street, I think. Golden Gate Avenue. I must leave you here." He choked. "I want to thank you, Mr. Brown, for what you've told me. You've—you've taught me something tonight I might never have known."

"Lor'!" said Mr. Brown. "I never taught you nothin'. The other bloke might 'ave, if you'd watched his footwork careful. I'm only a scrapper. Good-night, sir."

They shook hands and parted.

MR. DICKSON paced slowly on, his hands deep in his pockets. Ashamed, bewildered, and almost frightened, he pondered on what the little fighter had told him.

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What was it? Anything was better than being a quitter! People respected a man who fought until he could fight no longer. He had meant the ring, of course. But did it not apply to other things as well? Life, for instance. Was he, Edward Dickson, a quitter? Had *he* done all he could in his own fight, or was he lying down and taking the count to save himself punishment?

He shivered as if cold and quickened his steps. Looking up a little later he found he was walking toward the park, in which direction lay his own home. He stopped, frowning wearily. Had he not been bound for the Ferry Building and—and what? Was there not fifteen thousand dollars to be earned that night?

Would it be hard to die? Or easy? He wondered. A little of both, probably. And then another thought flashed through his mind. Which would be harder, though? To die, or to live on, as he would live, in sickness and poverty!

The little boxer, beaten in each one of nineteen rounds, fighting for a sick wife and his own honor, had shown him the truth. He was a coward! A quitter! And for fifteen thousand dollars!

He hurried on and on, at times breaking into a little run, under the trees in the Panhandle, through streets of dark houses, on and on, panting for breath, stopping occasionally to cough, until at last he reached the narrow-fronted house which was his home.

A LIGHT was burning in his wife's bedroom. A panic seized him and he shivered. What if he were too late!

He tiptoed up the front steps and opened the door.

Mrs. Parrish stood at the foot of the stairs as though awaiting his arrival. She had been weeping, fresh lines marked her tired face.

"How is she?" he whispered. "Hey? What are you looking like that for, hey?"

"Where have you been, Edward?" she asked dully.

"Me! Watching a fight. Boxing," he answered almost without thinking. "And Alice? How's Alice?"

Mrs. Parrish uttered a short laugh.

"*You!*" She choked. "And we—we thinking that something had happened! A fight!"

"How's Alice?" persisted Mr. Dickson. "Why don't you tell me, hey? What is it?"

"No better. She thinks—thinks something has happened. She's worse."

He smiled, for he knew that there was yet hope.

"Thank God! And Gordon?"

She eyed him in dull amazement as he patted her shoulder.

"No worse," she said.

"Good!" said Mr. Dickson.

He ran upstairs and entered his wife's room with its shaded light and heavy odor of medicines.

"Alice!"

He bent over the bed, his heart thumping unsteadily.

The sick woman opened her eyes, and seeing him gave a little cry.

"Ed," she whispered. "Oh, Ed! I thought——"

"You poor little thing! Alice, girl, you shouldn't——"

"Ed, I thought you were dead. And I'd—I'd been so cruel to you this afternoon. I'm sorry." She buried her head in his shoulder and sobbed quietly. "I thought you'd left me to—to fight alone—me and mother and the kiddies."

He soothed her awkwardly, uttering crooning noises.

"You poor child! You poor little girl! There now, there!"

After a time she quieted down and lay in his arms very white and still.

"Alice, old girl, I've been a coward. I'm not going to give in. I'll not quit. We'll see this thing through ourselves. You and I."

She clung to him tightly.

"It's a fight that's worth winning," he said. "Worth fighting. I'm no quitter."

"I knew you weren't," said the sick woman proudly. "I knew all along. They said—but I knew better."

And Mr. Dickson felt strangely big and brave and a queer little feeling rose to his throat and made speech difficult.

"You're so brave," she said, and he shivered.

"Alice. Listen, dear! We're going to leave San Francisco. We'll live in the country, dear, down in the south of the state. We're going to El Nogal, dear. Do you mind?" He hesitated. "It 'ull be better for all of us—for your health and mine."

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The clasp on his hand tightened.

"I'm—I'm so glad, Ed. So glad! What made you change your mind, Ed?"

"H'sh!" he said.

"Ed, dear," she murmured; "Ed, it seems—we've begun over again." He pressed her thin hand in his. "Ed, would you mind sitting here a while? I think—think I'm going to sleep."

From the next room came the fretful cry of a waking child, footsteps sounded in the street below, a dog set up a barking, in the distance sounded the *clang-clang* of a trolley-car.

He felt sleepy and tired. His head ached and a frantic longing to cough tore his lungs. Gradually a sense of depression stole over him. What of the future? Must he spend the rest of his life working behind a counter among strangers? In a place he would hate! And his health! He was ill, he knew. The doctor had warned him. Would he ever be strong again? Everything in the world was wrong, everything.

Was life worth living?

And then, staring across the darkened room, his wife's hand in his, he saw the ring, the mass of people, the lights overhead, and Charlie Brown of Lambeth, his face battered and bleeding, waiting in his corner for the call of time, unbeaten.

Mr. Dickson gritted his teeth. Was he to quit now? He smiled grimly.

"Seconds out!" he whispered. "Time!"

And Mr. Dickson then and there began the fight that was to end only in El Nogal in the store opposite the switch where the box-cars jump the track.

THE AMERICAN LEGION, ENDORSED BY EX-PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT AND MAJ. GEN. LEONARD WOOD

The Development Into A National Movement of the Organization Started and Built Up by This Magazine

LONG before this reaches your eye you will have learned from the newspapers all over the country that the Legion first proposed at our November Camp-Fire has burst into a nation-wide movement for the defense of the United States against any foreign invader. On The Legion's committees and boards, which control its policy, you have seen the names, along with others more humble, of some of the most prominent men in the land. The American Legion has grown very big indeed, and has become a thing to be reckoned with, not only in national, but in international affairs.

And the whole movement was originated at our own Camp-Fire—was given its first real start by Camp-Fire members and today has Camp-Fire members working earnestly on its executive force. You of the Camp-Fire should be first above all others to give it your support.

Here, briefly, is the story of its sudden growth: You remember the letter from E. D. Cook, written from Costa Rica last Summer. I never heard from him again and rumor has it that he went to the European War, but it was he who suggested forming "sort of a volunteer organization now, through *Adventure*"—a kind of regiment of Rough Riders, composed of our adventurers. The suggestion, when put to you of the Camp-Fire, met with instant favor. Gradually it became clear that here was a matter much bigger than a single regiment. Why not make the regiment an army? Why not add to that army of fighting-men a second army of men skilled in the trades and professions, needed as much in war as is the firing-line itself? Why not?

But that was too large a matter to be handled by any magazine, so I went to the best man I knew to take charge of the work of organization, Dr. J. E. Hausmann, formerly of our regular Army, with many years' service back of him. Though an already busy man, he at once agreed to do everything in his power for a plan that promised so much practical and vital help to our country in an hour of need.

Enrollments were coming in steadily.

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The idea itself continued to grow in scope. Even the mere routine of the work was growing too big for us. Therefore, too, it was worth being handled by a bigger organization. So I wrote to the man who seemed most likely to give fair hearing to any plan for the country's defense.

Two days later Dr. Hausmann and I personally laid the Legion's plans before Major-General Leonard Wood, of the United States Army, and then before Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. Both of these men—General Wood of course speaking only unofficially—were emphatic in their approval. Their letters, written after a thorough consideration of the work planned by the Legion, are given here:

Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay,
Long Island, N. Y.

February 22, 1915.

To the American Legion:

I am in the most cordial sympathy with your purpose, and I believe that the method you are adopting—that of raising what you call "The American Legion"—is an excellent way of realizing this purpose. I and my four sons will gladly become members. I very earnestly hope and believe that there will be no war, but the surest way to avert war is to be prepared for it; and the only way to avert disaster and disgrace in war is by preparation, both military and naval, in advance. In the event of war I should ask permission of Congress to raise a division of cavalry, that is, nine regiments such as the regiment I commanded in Cuba; and unquestionably the ranks of these regiments would largely be filled from the men of the Legion, and would in their entirety be filled by men such as those in the Legion. For in the event of war there will be no time to train the men first called upon, in such duties as shooting, riding and taking care of themselves in the open.

We should, as a nation, have begun to prepare ourselves the minute that this war broke out seven months ago. It is absolutely impossible to be sure, when there is such a tremendous war, that we shall not be drawn into it against our will. The people of this country are only beginning to realize the extent of our military and naval unpreparedness. Your proposal will help to accomplish one of the important things needed for defense—the formation of a first reserve—which is now entirely lacking in this country. Even the most extreme advocate of peace-at-any-price, can hardly raise an objection, since the Legion will only unify, classify and co-ordinate defensive factors already in existence. You must of course work in connection with the best men in the regular army, and I am pleased to learn that your scheme is heartily backed by our leading regular officers.

I shall be glad in response to the invitation from your Executive Committee, to serve as Chairman of the Board of Honorary Advisors. The indispensable thing for every free people to do, in the present day, is with efficiency to prepare against war by making itself able to defend its rights. It is idle for us to trust to arbitration and neutrality treaties unbacked by force; it is idle to trust to the tepid good will of other nations; it is idle to trust to alliances. Let us act justly toward others and let us also be prepared with stout heart and strong hand to defend our rights against injustice from others.

I earnestly hope that all good American citizens will, through you, put at the disposal of the country the qualifications and the training, such as each may possess, that will render him valuable to our country in wartime. In the event of war, we shall at once need thousands of chauffeurs, thousands of men able to organize a railway corps, hundreds of aviators, thousands of engineers and many scores of thousands of men able to march, to shoot, to dig trenches, to take care of themselves when they live in the open and, above all, able to show that at need they have the fighting edge. Those men should register themselves so that their services may be immediately available if—which may Heaven forfend—war should break out.

Faithfully yours,

(Signed,) THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

February 12, 1915.

To the American Legion:

I have read your letter of the 6th instant with very great interest. Naturally I can not speak officially for the War Department, nor indicate what position would be taken by those in authority in regard to your Legion. I am well aware, however, of the great wealth of material that exists in this country, and believe that their enrolment and classification alone would be most valuable, if nothing else were done.

No one realizes better than I what good soldiers men make who can shoot and ride; who are sportsmen and accustomed to out-of-door life, and in what short time they become disciplined. My own Regiment, the First Volunteer Cavalry, in 1898, was organized from just this class of men, and their record speaks for itself.

Your application for membership strikes me as being very complete, and would undoubtedly furnish most valuable data.

I am confident from my study of the documents you have shown me that your Legion would loyally stand ready to adapt itself to a comprehensive national-defense scheme which may later be promulgated by proper authority.

Speaking unofficially, I am glad to express my approval of your plan, and hope

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that you will succeed in enrolling many valuable men who could thus be quickly called to the colors in time of need.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed,) LEONARD WOOD.

Before this reaches your eye, many of you will have seen the little booklet The American Legion is now preparing as a statement of its purpose and nature. And many of you, I hope, will have received and filled out the application-blanks, and will be wearing the red, white and blue enamel button, for there may be need of the Legion.

WAR FOR THE UNITED STATES?

HERE is the situation: Some people say this country will never become involved in a war. God knows where they get their information. They said the same thing about Europe, and the most terrible war of history has made fools of them. Nobody in the world can be *sure* this country will not be dragged into a war. And unless we *are* sure, it is only common sense to provide against the ugly possibility. A man may be *pretty* sure his home will not burn down, but he insures it just the same.

These people say that, even if there is war, we are already sufficiently prepared. They don't know the facts, of course, and are so afraid of what the facts may prove to be that they oppose any investigations by those less given to hasty judgments.

ONE of their favorite arguments is an outcry against "militarism." Who suggested militarism? Nobody. In our cities we appoint an adequate number of police, give them arms, and expect them to use the arms in case of necessity. Does that make the police a menace, or a protection?

Another of their pet ideas, arising from a false and idiotic patriotism, is that Americans can lick anybody else anyway. Maybe we can—if we meet them on something like an equal footing and not under a hopeless handicap. Those people say we can raise an army of 18,000,000. We can, but we haven't. By the time we did and trained and equipped them we could be licked three times by any first-class power, after a needless sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of our men and billions of our dollars. For some three or four months after we were invaded those 18,000,000 men wouldn't be worth the powder to blow them up, and if we blew them up we'd have to borrow the powder from the enemy, not having it ourselves. What would the 18,000,000 Americans fight with—pamphlets proving that this country couldn't get into a war? There would be no guns, ammunition or uniforms for them, not to mention hospital corps, supply-trains, artillery officers, and a dozen other little things like that.

OUR country's past experiences ought to put a quietus on this kind of pseudo-patriotism. Only twice have we fought a first-class power. Both times the enemy had on her hands another bigger war in Europe. In the Revolution we lost more battles than we won and had to be helped out of the mess by France. In the War of 1812 we lost every land battle of the war except Lundy's Lane (a draw) and New Orleans (fought after the declaration of peace), and Washington, the national capitol, was captured and burned by a force of the enemy numbering only one-half to two thirds of the Americans opposed to them. In both wars Americans, man for man, were as good natural fighters as the enemy, perhaps better, but they lacked the training and equipment of the foe and were frequently defeated by inferior numbers, our country meanwhile being laid waste. And training and equipment are five times as important today as they were then.

LET'S have done with this false and treacherous brand of patriotism and face the fact that our country is a big, helpless lump of territory, ridiculously unprepared to defend itself, and so rich it is a tempting prey. An American can be made into a soldier equal or superior to the best product of any nation on earth. But, untrained and unequipped, he is practically no good against the highly trained and fully equipped troops of any foreign power.

Against an invader with 200,000 men and more to come, we would have *actually available* a regular army about three times the police force of New York City. What else? Militia. At best a total of about 60,000 men. It would take thirty days to assemble them. Hospital, transport, commissary, supply, motors, aeroplanes, horses and a dozen other things would be sadly lacking. Volunteers would be of no use for months. The result would be a devastation of a

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large part of this country as awful as that of Belgium, and no mere bravery on our part could save the day.

SOMETHING must be done *in advance* to meet that desperate need for trained men. If the Government won't provide, the people themselves must. The Legion, as now developed, offers you your opportunity to do your share, and to do it in the way most valuable to the Government.

WHAT THE LEGION IS

THE Legion has two objects. First, to register and enroll every man who has had regular army or navy training. Also every man who can shoot straight and has learned how to take care of himself roughing it in the open—adventurers, cowboys, prospectors, trappers, constabulary, etc., etc. No peace service required. Merely keep the Legion notified of changes of address and report to the nearest Legion headquarters at the first sign of hostilities.

This will give you a chance to serve with other seasoned men instead of with raw recruits. It will also give you the best chance in the whole country of getting to the front *at once* without previously joining the regulars or militia. The regular army is never recruited to its full strength. In case of war it would need to fill out its ranks at once. There is no reserve to draw on—the reserves of other powers number their hundreds of thousands; ours, provided for by law two years ago, has now a total of *sixteen men!* The Army will turn eagerly to our carefully selected body of trained men. In fact, there is no other place to turn to. The Legion will become the reserve the Army now lacks. The militia is in the same plight as the regulars. In so far as possible, Legioners will be organized into units of their own — regiments like the famous Rough Riders, and sub-units to be used where most needed. By joining the Legion you can get to the firing-line while ordinary volunteers are just starting in on months of training and preparation.

THE second object of the Legion is still more comprehensive and appeals to a very large part of our population.

Modern war demands much more than soldiers for the firing-line. All the following will be needed and needed *quick*:

Soldier—Marine—Sailor (steam)—Sailor (sail)—Master—Mate—Man-o'-war's man—Naval gunner—Naval electrician—Naval carpenter—Torpedo boat service—Destroyer boat service—Submarine service—Navigating officer—Infantry—Cavalry—Field artillery—Machine guns—Coast or siege artillery—Engineer corps—Signal corps—Hospital corps—Sanitary corps—Explorer—Prospector—Miner—Mining engineer—Civil engineer—Mechanical engineer—Hydraulic engineer—Electrical engineer—Sanitary engineer—Electrician—Mechanic—Veterinary—Doctor—City police—Constabulary—Trader—Cowboy—Transport driver—Guide—Scout—Trapper—Hunter—Lumberman—Carpenter—Fireman (city)—Telegraphist—Telephone lineman—Telephone operator—Automobile driver—Automobile mechanic—Aeroplane driver—Aeroplane mechanic—Surveyor—Wireless operator—Wireless mechanic—Railroad engineer—Railroad fireman—Stationery engineer—Railroad construction—Farrier—Diver—Warship construction—Maker of ammunition—Nurse—Baker—Chauffeur or motorist—Motor-cyclist—Field photographer—etc., etc., etc.

Many governments keep their own official record of such men. Ours, it seems, does not. Very well, let's do it for them. The point is to have it done. It may help save blood, money and futile rage in the day of extremity.

It will be the Legion's work to enroll every man having training valuable in case of war. They will be numbered, classified, cross-indexed, their addresses kept up-to date. In case of war, even before it is formally declared, and before the Government can issue a public call for such men, the Legion's lists can be turned over to the War and Navy Departments, the men notified and held in readiness or assigned for actual service.

Department headquarters will be established in various parts of the United States and its possessions. All enrollments, however, are to be sent to headquarters in New York and there recorded. Dues are nominal—twenty-five cents a year.

In addition to Line and Special there will probably be an Honorary Service, open to all, giving opportunity to help the Legion and our country to those who can not volunteer their services but are ready to help with their influence and in other ways.

The American Legion knows no discriminations of racial extraction, political or religious beliefs, wealth or social standing. But get this part of it very straight. Only American citizens need apply, and every man who enrolls will sign his name to his declaration that he gives his allegiance at any and all times, without reservation, to the United States of America over and

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above all other nations whatsoever. Also, there will be no officers in the Legion. Those who enlist must enlist to serve their country, not themselves. They must offer what they have and let the War Department or the Navy Department dispose of it as the country's need may dictate. All enter the Legion on an equal footing. Each will be used, when the time comes, as his training and ability indicate.

This magazine has no voice in the management or affairs of the Legion and no interest in it other than your own and mine—to do what it can to serve our country in a practical way. If you are an American, do your share. The Legion's application-blank and booklet will be sent free to you if you drop a post-card to The Secretary, The American Legion, Maritime Building, 10 Bridge Street, New York.

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers.

AS YOU see most of our space this month has been given to the American Legion in the article just preceding. The Legion was born and grew up among us of the Camp-Fire and we do not grudge it our space.

AT THE January Camp-Fire we had a letter from one of our number, an Australian, written on board the steamship *Condor* at Talara, Peru, en route to New York. You may remember that a considerable number of adventures had fallen to his lot and that his account of the voyage on the *Condor* was an amusing one. As previously stated, my letter to his only address, the British Consul in New York, elicited no reply. I ventured the guess that he might now be on some European battlefield, and the following letter from him shows that I happened to be right:

Just a brief note to let you know I am again in service. I received your letter at the Consulate, New York, but hostilities had commenced on my arrival at St. Lucia, West Indies. I had no chance of calling, being sent with other ex-soldiers, straight on to Canada, then home to England.

I can give you no news, as a rigid censorship is exercised, besides, people at home and in America get the news of how things are progressing as soon as or before the troops know it. Suffice it to say that in this campaign the British are more than keeping up the traditions of the Empire. The suffering and misery troops at the front are enduring can not be expressed in mere words, and through it all Tommy keeps on smiling.

We have not the slightest doubt as to the issue, though it may be a question of time. Should you run across, among the members of the Club, any Australians or Canadians, tell them I should like to get a note from them.—Identification Card No. 1781.

"THE GETAWAY" last month and "Under False Colors" in this issue are by Rudolph R. Krebs, his first stories in our magazine, and he follows our custom of making himself known to the Camp-Fire. Born at Watertown, Wisconsin, college at Bethlehem, Pa., knocking around New York and Philadelphia newspaper offices, teaching at Lake Geneva, Wis., salesman, Chicago. If I weren't afraid of spoiling it in advance for some of you I'd quote what he says about "Under False Colors."

AS YOU may remember, Joseph Mills Hanson has grown up among soldiers and Indians, law-makers and law-breakers, frontiersmen, steamboatmen and freighters. Many of you have read his books, "The Conquest of the Missouri," "With Sully into the Sioux Land," "Frontier Ballads," etc. His story in this issue will make vivid to us the life of the old days on our Western frontier—a life he is particularly well equipped to set forth as the background of fiction. A word from him direct:

Though I have had few of the raw experiences of the frontier myself, I have been bred up in the atmosphere of them since childhood. My own father

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was one of the founders of Yankton and of Dakota Territory in 1858, and, as I said in the dedication of one of my books, he has "lived through more adventures than a volume could describe." This country is still full of men who knew those same rough days face to face, and I am happy to be able to count many of them my friends, while my historical writing and my association, as a Companion of the Second Class, with the war-worn officers, regular and volunteer, of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, have given me many other friends and acquaintances among those who have safeguarded the nation with their lives and their swords.

FOR nearly a year I've been in correspondence with an American serving on H. M. S. ——, now on war service at the Dardanelles. I've never seen him, but we've come to be pretty good friends by letter. Also, one of his British friends on the same ship.

Recent letters from them are interesting, though of course all mail passes through the hands of the British censor. The American and one of his English mates saw the blowing up of the *Bulwark* in the Thames. Writes the latter:

Now concerning the *Bulwark*. I saw that, and all that was possible to see was a ship one moment and a cloud of smoke the next. You would not believe it possible unless you saw it. Sir, just try and picture standing on the Battery at New York and watching a ship one minute and the next a loud rumbling like thunder—a loud explosion, a cloud of smoke and débris the next. 840 lives plunged into eternity in less than two minutes. It was grand, but awful. I never want to see the same again.

Now the American's account:

I SAW the *Bulwark* blown up on the 25th Nov. at 8:53. I was standing on the fo'c'sle looking at a naval hydroplane flying right beyond the *Bulwark*. Suddenly a huge cloud of smoke ascended where the ship *was*, and débris and burning fittings were falling from this. A fellow on the bridge hollered "My God! The *Bulwark's* gone!" and, sure as spigs, when that smoke cleared, 30 seconds after it rose, the hooker had gone clean.

Ruffled water and floating wreckage marked the spot, and say, you never saw smarter boat work than our ships showed right then. Besides plenty of steamboats hanging around the harbor, every ship called away her life-boats, which means of course that the first men in the cutters go away in them. By 8:55 our cutters were manned—stokers, seamen, officers, marines, cooks, etc., were the crews; but they put in some weight behind those oars, and before long a whole crowd of boats were dashing toward that wreckage.

WHEN we got there, a heap of bedding, ditty-boxes, kit-bags, hats, tables and stools (smashed sure) were floating, but not a sign of life. However, our boat got one fellow. The bowman spotted him and hauled him inboard, all but his legs, and I guess the whelks had them. He was alive, but as he was laid in the stern-sheets he "rolled up" without a groan. Just as well he did. I reckon it's a "bake" trying to enjoy life minus your spars.

We hooked another poor devil, at least his head and shoulders—one arm blown right into his chest and his intestines were hanging out of his trunk; from his chest downward had departed from him. His lower jaw was round the back of his head and naturally he was "paid in."

I won't give you any more of these details, but we got five more of them, each one more interesting than its predecessor, but no living persons. 840 went out that morning, and I guess I've seen all I want to of cordite explosions, especially before breakfast, though I did pretty well, being peckish.

THERE are several theories as to the origin of the blow-up, the most probable being: 1. They were taking in ammunition and may have dropped a lyddite, fused, and caused it that way. 2. An electric lead in the ammunition passages may have fused. 3. Overheating of the guncotton magazines. 4. Carelessness, probably smoking cigarettes in the magazine.

Those, I reckon, are the most feasible. It was sure an internal explosion and the few survivors know nothing of the cause, so it will always be a mystery. Personally, I bet on the electric-wire stunt. If my turn comes during this war, I hope I go out as suddenly as those fellows. It's so quick you ain't got time to study the feel of it.

Farther on he pays this tribute to their enemy:

MIND you this: I don't underrate our enemies, because those who have fought us at sea have certainly done their best, only we did better, I guess, though they seem to have stuck to their guns to the last.

And here the real American speaks out, lonely for his favorite weapon:

There is only one thing I want to get hold of now, and that is a good 6-shot (Colt). I lost mine, some time before war was declared, and a fellow feels lost if he ain't heeled.

IT'S been a long time since we've had a tale from Thomas Samson Miller. Old members of the Camp-Fire will remember that when he writes about West Africa he writes from personal experience, having for some time been in the service of the old Royal Niger Charter Company.

OUR Identification Cards, each printed in eleven languages, identification by serial number only, provide for notification through *Adventure* of friend or relative in case of the bearer's serious emergency or death. One will be sent free to any reader on receipt of the necessary two names and address and a stamped and addressed envelope. ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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WANTED MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published**

FOUR men of courage and endurance who can stand warm climates and are willing to go into remote fever-ridden district of Yucatan, Mexico. I promise nothing because of the hazardous nature of the enterprise. But if we succeed I promise wealth. We shall share alike. I saw the possibilities a year ago while on special duty from my ship in the interior of Mexico. We start in April, when my naval enlistment expires. I pay all initial expenses. Applicants must all have had mining experience, and one must be well informed archeologically.—Address CALTE RICHARDS, U. S. S. New Hampshire, care Postmaster, N. Y. C.

WOULD like to write to three or four young Canadian cow-punchers or lumber-jacks, or any outdoor man from 18 to 29. Would be glad to write to any one who is lonesome. I am a civil engineer; 22 years old; 5 ft. 10 in. tall; black hair, blue eyes. Fond of outdoors. Hunting my favorite sport.—Address JACK CONDO, Westmoreland Co., Jeannette, Pa.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

WOULD like to connect with some one going to South or Central America. Have a little knowledge of Spanish; am in good health; 32 years old; unmarried. Not afraid of hardships.—Address W 267.

PARTNER near own age for any honest proposition Am 21 years old; dead shot with rifle, good shot with pistol; 5 ft. 11 in., 185 lbs.—Address FRANK FOLSOM, 598 Washington Ave., Memphis, Tenn.

PARTNER about 19 years old to go West, or if there already, to connect with and travel around a little, working our own way until we find something or some place mutually satisfactory, and then stick. Am 17, fairly educated, and willing to work.—Address No. W 265.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

FIFTEEN or twenty men to make trip into South America. Must be young and able to rough it and have some knowledge of mining; also must know how to ride a horse.—Address JACK CONDON, Gen. Del., San Francisco, Cal.

YOUNG man about 25 as pal for trip around world. Must not be afraid to rough it and stand hard knocks. Must be somewhat of a linguist. This is purely an adventuring trip, but do not want a professional bum. Must be good shot, and have enough capital for his share at start. American or English preferred.—Address FULLER, care R. L. WEAVER, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, W. I.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

JOHNNY WISE, 25 years; 5 ft. 10 in.; blue eyes and dark hair. Professional baseball player. Last heard of in Yaqui Indian country, Mexico, prospecting for gold. Johnny Wise, if you see this and write me I will make you a good proposition to lead an expedition to you know where.—Address JACK CONDON, Gen. Del., San Francisco, Cal.

JAMES P. DAVIS, father; last heard of 1901, Harper, Kansas. 5 ft. 8 in.; 160 lbs.; sandy mustache. Two fingers off right hand; 55 years.—Address HARRY L. DAVIS, 143 Park St., Batavia, Ill.

FREDERICK CROSS, formerly of Dayton, Ohio. Disappeared from Minneapolis, Minn. Last heard of Montreal, Can. Please write your aunt and cousins.—Address E. H. CROSS, 613 Highland Ave., Toledo, Ohio.

ROSS PARKER, med. student Michigan, '05-'07; later at Northwestern Medical College, Chicago, '07 and '08. Was from North Dakota. Member of Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity.—Address DR. J. BURNIE GRIFFIN, St. Augustine, Fla.

FRANK SULLIVAN, my brother. Last heard from July, 1913, in Temora, N. S. W., Australia. Has been prospecting and droving for some years.—Address B. SULLIVAN, Union Printers Home, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GEORGE H. JEWELL, father. Last heard of Galveston, Tex. Photographer. Hair turning gray; age 50; 5 ft. 5 in.; smooth shaven.—Address HARRY B. JEWELL, 132nd Co., C. A. C., H. G. Wright, N. J.

JAMES CROMPTON of Leeds, Mass. Last heard of Santa Barbara, Cal.—Address N. E. CROMPTON, 263 Maple St., Holyoke, Mass.

HAROLD C. MEEK. Last heard from Denver, Col., 1907.—Address CHARLES A. SNYDER, 303 Equitable Bldg., Des Moines, Iowa.

WARREN ECKLES, cousin. Last known address 625 E. 16th St., or 334 W. 16th St., New York City. Worked there for Psome Co., china-ware dealers.—Address, V. A. ST. JOHN, Wayland, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MIKE L. FOLEY, brother. Last heard leaving Hugo, Okla., for Kansas wheat harvest, June, 1914. 5 ft. 6 in.; 135 lbs.; light complexion; brown hair; blue eyes. Raised in Louisiana. Age 22. Toe off left foot. Crippled with rheumatism and limps badly.—Address CHARLES R. FOLEY, Paris, Texas.

JOHN FRAZIER, last heard of in the navy. MARION FRAZIER, last heard of in the oil-fields of California. WILLIAM GARRETT, last heard of in Ventura, Cal. FLORENCE SHERIFF, last heard of in Los Angeles. M. R. FRAZIER, last heard of in the borax fields of California as supt. of mines. Have been separated for eighteen years from brothers, father, and sister.—Address ALBERT EVANS, 2506 Wabash Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.

JAMES KENNETH CROSS, age 34; 5 ft. 9 in.; dark complexion; good musician, clarinet. Last heard of New York, 1909, working in broker's office.—Address CARL P. CROSS, Box 723, Cobalt, Ont., Can.

RILEY H. BREED. 6 ft. 2 in.; 200 lbs. Winnipeg, Manitoba, in Fall of 1909; Spokane, Wash., same Christmas.—Address P. L. HOWARD, 22 Minot St., Neponset, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

HARRY FLOYD, father, once stage-driver, Idaho. Afterward Supt. Mail Dept. Pacific Coast mail steamers. Last heard of 'Frisco, 1893, en route Sydney, Australia. 65 yrs.; 5 ft. 10 in.; light hair.—Address HARRY FLOYD, Clarkston, Wash., care Gen. Del.

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HARRY WINSMAN. Last heard from 18 W. 108th St., New York City. Traveled with "The Lily and The Prince" Company.—Address T. J. KELLY, 382 Duluth E., Montreal, Can.

JOE ROBERTS, formerly of Chicago, Ill. Write your old pal.—Address FRANK PENT, 230 E. Superior St., Chicago, Ill.

CHARLES KELLY, last heard from with Carnival Show, wintering at Argenta, Ark., 1912.—Address W. C. CHURCH, Monroe, La.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JAMES M. CRAFT, sometimes called Taylor. Last heard of Lawton and Oklahoma City, 1906, '07. Had stable of race-horses.—Address W. W. CRAFT, R. R. No. 6, Box 184, Los Angeles, Cal.

ANDREW DOUGLAS McBRIDE (Andy Douglas). Traveled through Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and left him in Detroit 1895.—Address C. B. YOUNG, Kentland, Ind.

DAN GRAHAM, age 32. Lived Superior, Wis., twelve years ago. Last heard as wheeler on S. S. *Harold B. Nye* on Lakes. Will reward informant.—Address JOSEPH GRAHAM, 560 Bathurst St., London, Ont., Can.

MEMBERS of Stanley-Pryce and Masby's outfits in Lower California, 1910 and 1911. Especially if you were member of Troop A in battle of Tia Juana.—Address BERT KOLLMAN, 8309 Oak St., New Orleans, La.

MARK RICE (Serrott). Gasoline engineer. Want him to go to Alaska with me this Summer. Last heard from California.—Address FRANCIS ROTCH, JR., 903 Jefferson St., Seattle, Wash.

CHARLES MAYNELL, last heard of New York, 1893.—Address L. T. No. 266.

WILLIAM H. JONES (Bill), left Memphis, Tenn., 1912 for Cal. Last heard from him Los Angeles, Cal.—Address H. G. WORTON, 1039 Vollentine Ave., Memphis, Tenn.

FRED BERGHOLEN. 5 ft. 5¼ in.; complexion light; blue eyes. Last heard from working in South as baker.—Address JOHN BERGHOLEN, 43 W. Union St., Pittsfield, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

NICK SCHENER, last heard from Texas about 1899. Please write niece.—Address MRS. GEORGE FOLSOM, 598 Washington Ave., Memphis, Tenn.

HARRY BENSON. Last heard of Mansfield Center, Conn. Write your pal of six Summers ago.—Address ROLAND E. GAY, Saybrook Point, Conn.

HARRY A. NICHOLSON, or Nickerson. 27 yrs. Last letter from Ft. Smith, Kansas.—Address MRS. L. O'HARRA, 2126 9th St., Berkeley, Cal.

A. TREASDALE (Weasel). In Montreal, Can., 1912. Last heard of heading for Shushanna gold strike. Rumored he left for front last Aug.—Address SAM PARKER, Gen. Del., Victoria, B. C., Can.

JOHN ANDREW WILL, formerly of W. 18th St., New York. Last heard of Can. News of his sisters if he will write JOHN S. HOPNOW, 162 E. 90th St., New York City. Canadian papers please copy.

DON BRUSH, believed to be in U. S. Navy, formerly of Detroit, Mich., and Birmingham, Mich.—Address DR. J. BURNIE GRIFFIN, St. Augustine, Fla.

ARTHUR BROWN of Oklahoma City. Last heard from Lewistown, Mont. Friends of "101" eager to hear from you.—Address WALTER BLESY, Inceville, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JIMMY BREW, Jess Howard, Little Mack, and George Padgett, who were in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1907.—Address H. MONEYSMITH, 603 A Street, N. W., Ardmore, Okla.

GROVER C. SYKES, last heard of Honaker, Va.—Address G. C. C., care Z. P., Ancon, C. Z.

J. F. LUECKE, telegraphier. Last heard from Livingston and Belgrade, Montana, with Northern Pacific Railway.—Address E. D. PREY, Tropical Radio Telegraph Co., New Orleans, La.

BEN LUSCUMB, bunkie Hospital Corps Columbus Barracks, Ohio, 1906-08. Last heard of Philippines.—Address GEO. U. VAN FLEET, Elm Park, Edmonton, Can.

C. H. (SPUD) KOYNORS, please write your friend of three months ago. Important.—Address FREDERIC H. GIBBONS, Ottawa, Can.

HARRY F. REED, railroad clerk and car-inspector, formerly with S. P. de Mex. at Empalme, Mexico. Last heard of at El Reno, Okla., 1912, traveling West. Any one from USSC *Alaska*, in 1904-06.—Address E. D. PREY, Tropical Radio Telegraph Co., New Orleans, La.

A. J. Love from home. Please send a word.—MOTHER AND ADELE, L. T. 264.

JOSE L. PERALTO, Mexico, Y. M. C. A. athlete, last seen New Orleans, La.—Address AL DE COSTE, 521 Columbus Ave., Boston, Mass.

FORREST BENNETT WHITTAKER of E. Braintree, Mass. Last heard from Cristobal, C. Z.—Address AL DE COSTE, 521 Columbus Ave., Boston, Mass.

JIM VANDERDASSON. Once in woods, Payette and Snake Rivers, Idaho. Afterward rancher Rogue River, Ore.—Address SANDON PERKINS, F. R. G. S., Post Office, Toronto, Can.

WILLIAM J. MASON. Left Trenton, N. J., 1892 for Hoosick Falls, N. Y.—Address JOHN HUFFMAN, Glen Una, Los Gatos, Cal.

McCORMACK. We were together 1912-13, construction work, Mexico, Necaxa district on Laxaxalpam tunnels.—Address CHESTER F. KIRSCHNER, Cinco Minas Co., Magdalena, Jalisco, Mexico.

COMRADES who served 34th Inf., Co. B, Philippines, 1899-1901.—Address ELMER PAGNETTE, Box 205, Santa Anna, Cal.

A. W. BEATON, once of Quincy, Ill., winner of 3-mile handicap, Alexandra Palace, 1880. Last heard from Cal., 1903.—Address L. B. LUSK, Quincy, Ill.

JULIUS C. DIGEL (Jack), left Castile, N. Y., for Oklahoma oil-fields, Feb. 1912. Crosby, N. D., Nov. 1912. 27 yrs.; 163 lbs.; 5 ft. 10 in.; dark hair; gray eyes. Probably in Can. or Mont.—Address CARL F. DIGEL, Cridersville, Ohio.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the March or April issue of ADVENTURE. They can get the name of inquirer from this magazine:

ARMBUSTER, JOSEPH ANTHONY; Allen, Robert; Bradford, Frank William; Cook, William, 14th Cavalry; Coppinger, Clarence; Davenport, James; Dowst, Arthur A.; Englehart, Adrian; Goldstein, S. A., Syracuse, N. Y.; Growman, Harry; Greenwood, Charles, trapper; Heckenhauer, Karl H.; Jenkins, Earl; Lewis, Harrison H. Jr.; Kennedy, Geo. F.; Lindsay, Sgt. Charles, Tucuran, P. I.; Loeber, Private Charles; McFall, Joseph (Bob Lee); McKeever, Arthur; McKenney, Hugh; Marsh, Memer (Lee or de Chantles); Matthews, Will Fred; Mendoza, Richarde; North, Donald, chief steward on Leyland Lines; Nylander, C. W.; Ogden, known as "Tex" or "Two Bar Slim"; Radcliffe, Col. John (Jack) Stanley; Reynolds, Sgt. William, Tucuran, Co. F, 23rd Inf.; Scisco, Leon D.; Stockton, Walter, 26th U. S. Vol. Inf.; "Struthers;" Stokes, P. A., Honolulu; Stewart, W. J. (Bill); Sutton, Edward Hepper; Turnnard, Frank Albert; Walker, Charles T.

MISCELLANEOUS: Descendants of Capt. Wm. Boyd, American officer in English Army 1750.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 107, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 218, W 231, W [illegible], C 189, C 198, C 205, L. T. 207. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pacheca, Mexico; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; Charles E. Mack, New York; William Barry Kane, Chocolate Bayou, Texas; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.; A. P. Price, Ashton, Birmingham, England.

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN and S. N. Morgan, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: As announced before, every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

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A substantial increase to your present salary is waiting for you in your home community—an opportunity to add $5.00 to $25.00 to your weekly pay-envelope.

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If you wish to increase your present earnings, better write to-day, while the matter is fresh in your mind.

Adventure

Spring and Macdougal Sts. New York

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A Few Soldiers

walked perhaps fifty yards in front of us. Then of a sudden came the shrapnel, the noise of a bundle of sticks broken across a giant's knee, the sudden little balloon of bomb smoke overhead.

The group of soldiers burst asunder with queer, tiny cries, mere startled squeaks. Two fell. One rose cursing; he had merely tripped over his own feet in trying to run; the other . . . . . .

Perceval Gibbon is telling what he himself saw. He has been living out there in the trenches. Day after day, night after night, unceasingly cannons belch forth. The death-laden shells scream and break. The wounded, the dying, the dead, mark their paths.

The picture is seared into his very soul. The bullets that passed him by have stricken down comrades at his side. He has lived this war. The frightful, ugly, horrifying suffering of it all is very real to him. It is his message to make it real to us.

Perceval Gibbon

takes you right into the trenches of the Russian Army in Poland. He brings home to you a vivid sense of this war's actualities. He makes you feel, and think, and realize.

Mr. Gibbon's is not a pretty story for war is not pretty—but if you want a strong, man's-size picture of the awfulness of this war, if you want your eyes to see what his eyes saw in the Russian trenches, you should read his article.

You will find it in

Everybody's Magazine

for **APRIL**

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